CJR
COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW
SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 1991◆$3

THE MEDIA IN THE RECESSION

HOW BAD IS IT?

WHO WILL UNWRAP THE OCTOBER SURPRISE?

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DAN QUAYLE: THE SEQUEL

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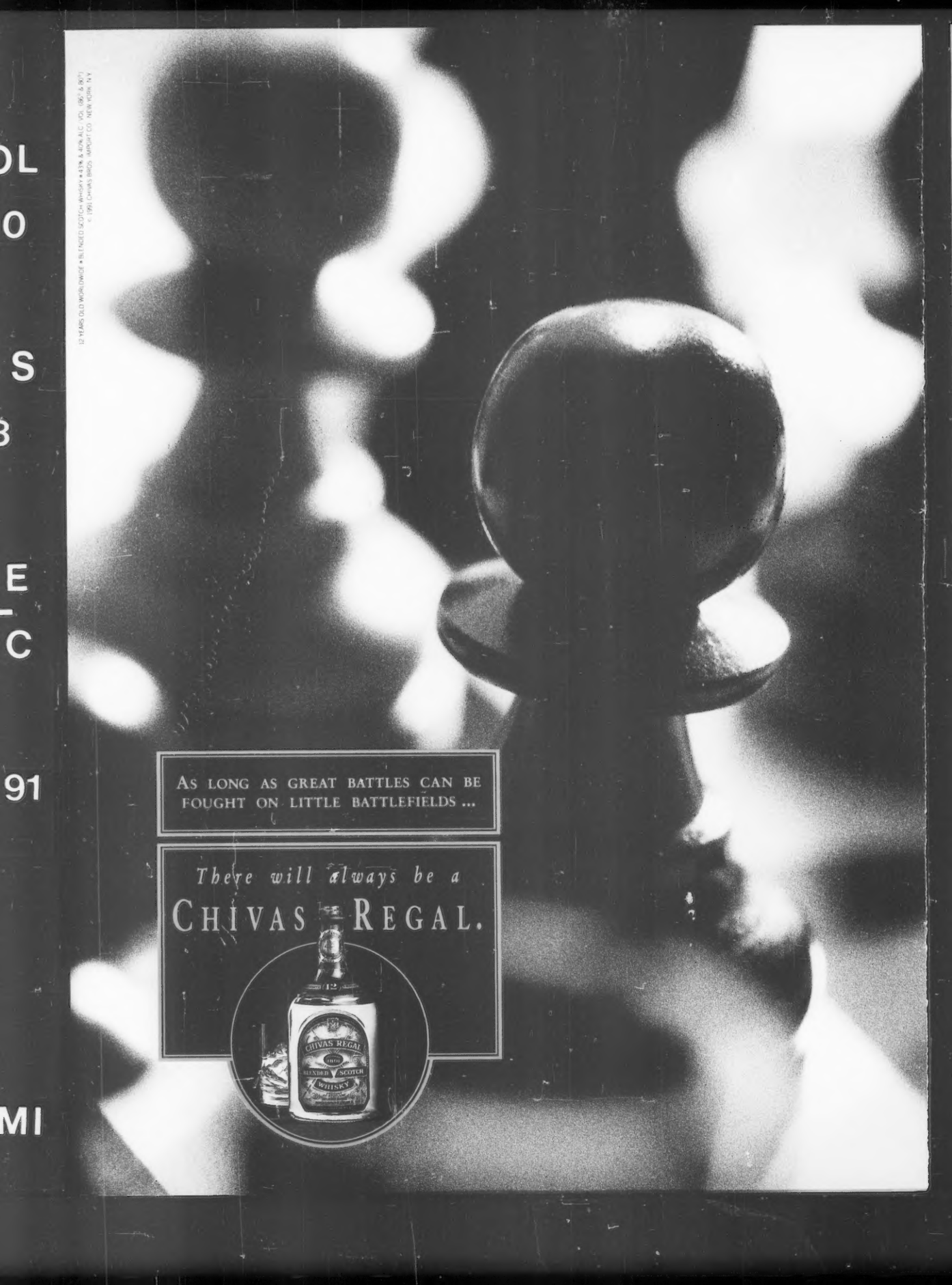
JAMES RESTON, ULTIMATE INSIDER

◆

JON ALPERT, ODD MAN OUT



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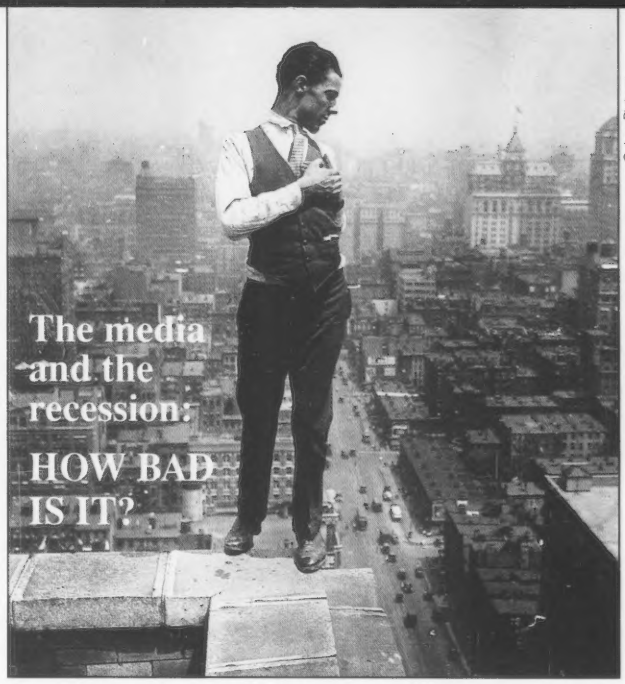
CJR

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 1991

"TO ASSESS THE PERFORMANCE OF JOURNALISM... TO HELP STIMULATE CONTINUING IMPROVEMENT IN THE PROFESSION, AND TO SPEAK OUT FOR WHAT IS RIGHT, FAIR, AND DECENT"

From the founding editorial, 1961

cover photo: Culver Pictures



Culver Pictures

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"IT WAS A REAL BLESSING," Frances Vaughn said after volunteers from the Christmas in April program gave her house a face lift.

"A whole slew of people gave up their weekend to help me. They fixed my back porch. Painted every room. Gave me a stove. They even put a brand-new roof on. I could've kissed every one of them."

This neighborly love is being rekindled all over America, thanks to Christmas in April.

Thousands of people from all walks of life are banding together to help the poor, the elderly, the handicapped.

By repairing homes, these caring volunteers are doing more than painting and hammering.

They're restoring dignity, hope and pride.

"TODAY I fell in LOVE with TWENTY perfect STRANGERS."

FRANCES VAUGHN
Washington, D.C.

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The launch of Christmas in April☆USA was made possible through the commitment of many people and corporations, including a grant from the Toyota USA Foundation. We're proud to say we've been a supporter from the very start.



As a result, the national body has been able to help more communities start local programs. (The number has grown from 13 to 52 in just over two years.)

Frances Vaughn is certainly thrilled the folks around Washington rallied behind Christmas in April.

In fact, she would have jumped through the roof with joy if it hadn't just been repaired.

TOYOTA

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LETTERS

ANATOMY OF AN ERROR

It was perhaps inevitable that in an article about inaccuracy I would make an error leading to the first published correction in my twenty-five years as a professional journalist. In "The Kitty Kelley Syndrome: Why You Can't Always Trust What You Read In Books" (CJR, July/August), I wrote this about Deborah Davis's Katharine Graham biography, *Katharine the Great*: "Harcourt Brace Jovanovich disavowed the book and shredded the remaining copies. It rose from the ashes eight years later, when National Press Inc. published what was billed as a 'second edition.' Nowhere did Davis or the publisher reveal what had happened to the first edition."

In fact, the second edition contains an introduction in which Davis discusses the shredding and her eventual suit and out-of-court settlement with the publisher, which paid $100,000 to Davis. In writing my article I relied on a copy of the second edition that I had purchased at a used book store in the city where I live. That copy contains no introduction. After Davis complained, I examined my copy closely and discovered that a number of pages, including the introduction, had been sliced out of the book. Strange, but true. I should also note that, in addition to writing a responsible introduction to the second edition, Davis has expanded that introduction for the third edition, scheduled to be published later this year by Sheridan Square Press.

Davis found another sentence of my summary troublesome, the one in which I wrote that Harcourt Brace Jovanovich decided that errors alleged by *Washington Post* editor Benjamin Bradlee "contained enough validity to call the whole project into question." Bradlee alleged thirty-nine factual errors. Davis's response to me, which she did not have an opportunity to offer originally, was this: "The errors were few and minor and they didn't even give me a chance to correct them. These errors were, in fact, used as an excuse to get William Jovanovich out of a sticky situation with two people, Bradlee and Graham, who can be very good friends but very nasty enemies." (Neither Bradlee nor Graham, it should be noted, sued Davis.)

My error about the introduction, for which I have apologized to Davis, demonstrates something more important than the need to examine used books carefully. It also demonstrates the necessity of fact-checking, a theme of my article. CJR articles are normally documented by the author, questioned by a line editor, and checked by researcher Margaret Kennedy. I have written often for CJR since 1975, and each piece underwent that procedure.

Until "The Kitty Kelley Syndrome," that is. I had been collecting information about inaccurate books for years; earlier this year, I persuaded CJR's editors to let me write an essay about the problem. The deadline was flexible. Then, just before the closing of the July/August issue, I submitted a rough draft; the next day CJR's editor-in-chief, Suzanne Levine, called to say that a major piece scheduled for the issue had fallen through. Could I turn my essay-in-progress into a major feature, she asked, and could I do it over the weekend?

Reluctantly, I said yes, expressing my misgivings about trying to complete a piece of this nature without having time to interview authors and publishing house editors. And, I added, how can we possibly document everything as thoroughly as usual? Because of the tight deadline, Margaret Kennedy went through many but not all of our normal checking procedures. The error about Deborah Davis's book is the result.

STEVE WEINBERG
COLUMBIA, MO.

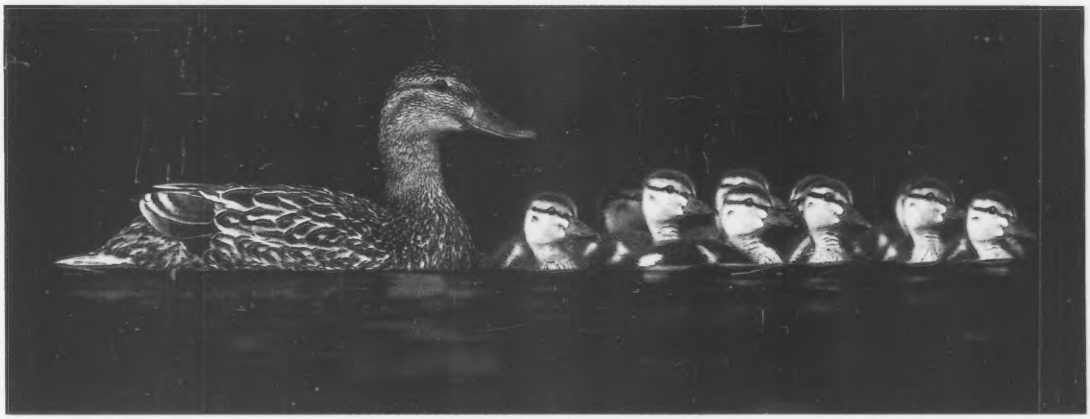
... AND A REPLY

Your article titled "The Kitty Kelley Syndrome" discusses inaccurate nonfiction books, using Kelley's biography of Nancy Reagan as the prime example.

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Boosted by grants from private landowners, state wildlife agencies in Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, New Mexico and Colorado, with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and Ducks Unlimited, Inc., matched donations from Phillips Petroleum to protect vital avian breeding and migrating habitats. Habitats that with resources and restoration could slow the dramatic decline of millions of ducks, geese and cranes from lack of water.

It was an unlikely alliance. But when five state governments, two wildlife conservation groups and one energy company came in with concern and came out with solutions, it seemed more inspired than unlikely, after all.

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For more information about what we are doing to protect our environment, write: Playa Lakes, Phillips Petroleum Company, 16C4 Phillips Building, Bartlesville, Oklahoma 74004.

I have no opinion about the accuracy of Kelley's book, since I have not checked her research; but as the author of *Katharine the Great*, a biography of *Washington Post* chairman Katharine Graham, I am outraged that you used my book as another example of the genre.

As has been reported many times, far more accurately than in your July/August issue, when *Katharine the Great* was first published in 1979, Katharine Graham and her executive editor, Benjamin Bradlee, pressured William Jovanovich, then chairman of Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, to recall the book and shred the entire print run. They achieved this through private threats and negative articles, written by their friends, in such publications as *The Village Voice* and *The Wall Street Journal*. Their strategy was to discredit me as a writer, and it almost worked: Jovanovich announced he was taking the book off the market because of "inaccuracies," and that is all anybody knew until 1982, when I sued for breach of contract and damage to reputation. Then Jovanovich, unable to substantiate his claim, paid me $100,000 to settle out of court.

I took the money, and made the legal documents available to reporters. *The New York Times*, The Associated Press, and *The Nation* were interested enough to run the story of what really happened; the *Columbia Journalism Review* was not.

When the second edition was published in 1987, it contained a long foreword giving all the sorry details of how my book was destroyed, and by whom, and quoting Bradlee's and Graham's letters to Jovanovich — letters I obtained during my lawsuit.

I want to make it clear that the animosity Graham and Bradlee have displayed toward my book over the years is due not to inaccuracies, but to the truth I tried to tell. Bradlee vehemently objects to my revelation that when he was press attaché at the U.S. embassy in Paris in 1952 and 1953, he helped coordinate U.S. propaganda to justify the execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. State and Justice Department documents reproduced in my book plainly show that he did so under the direction of the CIA station chief in Paris. Further, the book describes the relationship between the *Post* and the intelligence community, under Philip Graham and then under his widow, Katharine.

I understand why these revelations upset Bradlee and Graham and made them fear for their reputations. I am less able to understand why CJR, which exists precisely to keep journalism honest, would collaborate in a lie about the alleged inaccuracies of a single book, while ignoring the systematic way that powerful people can distort history for their own reasons. My book describes events that really happened; they are historical facts.

I regret that this magazine, through what I can charitably call inattention, has lent itself to the purposes of this powerful elite rather than to the truth.

DEBORAH DAVIS
NEW YORK, N.Y.

Editors' note: *We have published the letter from Steve Weinberg to correct the record. We have published the letter from Ms. Davis to give her the chance to express her opinions about our article and the subjects of her book. Our readers should know that we have not sought to check the accuracy of her allegations. We do regret the error in our article and offer our apologies to Ms. Davis and her publisher, as well as to our colleague Steve Weinberg.*

THE WHITTLE-XEROX DILEMMA

In your July/August issue you dart *Best of Business Quarterly*, a single-sponsor anthology published by Whittle Communications, for deleting from a reprinted article a mention of Xerox as one of several companies taking advantage of cheap Mexican labor. As Xerox is the sole advertiser of *BBQ*, this

EYEWITNESS



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surely makes Whittle look bad.

Over the years *BBQ* has reprinted several of my articles. In only one instance was any wording changed — also to delete a reference to Xerox. In my case, however, the reference was flattering.

In an article about another topic, I had included Xerox in a list of companies that generally practice social responsibility. Maybe Xerox's attitude toward Mexican labor shows I was wrong. At any rate, Whittle editors cut my favorable mention, telling me that since Xerox was the sole advertiser of *BBQ*, the publication's policy was never to mention the sponsor in any way, pro or con.

Sole sponsorship creates an unusual dilemma, and in this case Whittle's policy backfired. But at least *BBQ* has been consistent.

GREGG EASTERBROOK
WASHINGTON, D.C.

GE'S DIMMER BULB

It was altogether fitting that the decision by NBC News — recently charged with creating a "drowning pool" for many older employees (CJR, May/June) — to close its New York bureau was reported in the financial section of *The New York Times*. Journalism has taken a back seat to business at NBC News ever since General Electric took it over five years ago. As far as GE is concerned, NBC News might just as well be producing light bulbs.

It was also fitting that the president of NBC News, Michael Gartner, was on vacation when the closing was announced on July 11 and could not be reached for comment. Gartner is considered an absentee president by many at NBC News anyway.

The explaining was left to spokeswoman Peggy Hubble, who said, "We are focusing on analysis and interpretation of news," and to executive vice-president Don Browne. Browne was quoted as saying it was misleading to talk of the "closing" of the bureau, since some correspondents would remain in New York. Perhaps "euthanasia" might have been a more appropriate term.

Nevertheless, NBC News vows to remain aggressive in its reporting. Based on past trends, here are some predictions about future changes and plans for coverage:

- Remote-controlled cameras will be pointed out of various windows in the GE building. They will be monitored by a desk assistant. If something happens in front of the cameras that's deemed newsworthy, it will be the responsibility of the desk assistant to inform a news manager. If a tape editor is available, the happening will be put on the air.
- All NBC News and GE employees in the New York area will be urged to buy videocameras and be on the lookout for breaking news. Any employee whose tape is used on the air will be given points which will be entered into his or her personnel file and which will be taken into consideration during the next round of layoffs.
- NBC President Robert Wright, ensconced in his palatial new offices at 30 Rockefeller Center, will see a copy of *The New Yorker* and decide it should serve as the model for foreign coverage. Free-lance writers will periodically send in "Letters From Abroad," which will be read on the air to the accompaniment of pictures. If breaking news is involved, the Letter will be sent by Federal Express instead of by regular mail.
- Tom Brokaw's secretary will be named director of coverage for the 1992 presidential election campaign. It will be her responsibility to make sure all the candidates have Brokaw's direct telephone number so they can call him from wherever they're campaigning and let him know what's happening so he can report it on *Nightly News*.
- The White House correspondent will be supplied with a still camera and a fax machine to insure coverage of the fast-moving president.
- Rumors to the contrary, the Washington bureau will definitely not be closed. However,

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it will be turned into a PAC for NBC.

● GE laboratories will undertake research to develop robots to replace news anchors. The robots will be unisexual.

Meanwhile, Don Browne says, NBC News is continuing to provide quality news programming and adding news programs, such as *Exposé*, to its lineup. Somehow, that's not very reassuring.

And that noise you hear in the background? That's the sound of General David Sarnoff spinning in his grave.

RICHARD VALERIANI
SHERMAN, CONN.

Editors' note: *Valeriani was an NBC correspondent for twenty-seven years. His last assignment was in the New York bureau.*

MORE LIGHT ON WHYTE

In reference to Herbert Gans's letter in the July/August CJR regarding Vance Packard and Holly Whyte: Holly may not be a trained sociologist, but he is the best reporter I've ever known. He didn't "complain" about homogeneity in *The Organization Man*; he described it.

J.M. PERRY
THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
NEW YORK, N.Y.

Editors' note: *In the editing of Herbert Gans's letter Whyte became White.*

THE CREDIT LINE EXTENDED

We were pleased to see the credit in "EMFs and Cancer" (CJR, May/June) for AP's leading the way in reporting on the dangers from electromagnetic fields. One omission: the name of the reporter whose coverage was cited. He's Paul Raeburn, AP's science editor.

LOUIS D. BOCCARDI
PRESIDENT AND GENERAL MANAGER
ASSOCIATED PRESS
NEW YORK, N.Y.

NO-SHOW VOTERS

James Boylan's article on the role of the media in the decline of American voting and political interest ("Where Have All the People Gone?" CJR, May/June) suffered from an all-too-typical media omission: third parties.

Consider, for example, the 1988 presidential election. On the ballot in forty-seven states and in Washington, D.C., was Libertarian party nominee Ron Paul, a physician and former four-term Republican congressman. New Alliance party nominee Lenora Fulani was the first black female presidential candidate to be on *every* ballot and the first to receive federal matching funds. Paul, with his libertarian positions, and Fulani, with quasi-socialist positions, certainly expanded the voters' menu of presidential choices.

Unfortunately, the media in general and the national broadcast media in particular ignored the Paul and Fulani campaigns. I know the excuse: third-party candidates aren't going to win, so why cover them? That is an exercise in circular reasoning. Any candidate would have a hard time winning an election if the media ignored him (or her).

Where have all the voters gone? They're home, tired of Tweedledee and Tweedledum politics. Sick of the politics of me-tooism.

DANIEL F. WALKER
ATLANTA, GA.

TRIPPING UP ON BRAZIL

A belated response to Lawrence Weschler's "Baghdad in Brazil" (CJR, January/February). Specifically to his comment that *MacNeil/Lehrer* found no time for any South American segments during President Bush's trip there in December 1990. I do not know on what he bases that statement, certainly not on watching the *NewsHour*.

On December 3, as President Bush began his trip in Brazil, our correspondent Charles Krause filed a piece, running ten minutes and thirty-four seconds, on the trip, what the president hoped to accomplish, and the issues he would be addressing.

The *NewsHour* and Krause, a veteran of the South and Central American beats, have devoted considerable resources and time to covering those stories over the past eight years. A glimmer of recognition would seem to be more appropriate than unmerited criticism.

MICHAEL D. MOSETTIG
SENIOR PRODUCER
THE MACNEIL/LEHRER NEWSHOUR
NEW YORK, N.Y.

FOLLOW-UP

NAVAJOLAND: THE BIRTH OF A WEEKLY

Four years after Peter MacDonald pushed him off the Navajo Reservation by closing *Navajo Times Today*, a tribally owned newspaper, Mark Trahant is back.

As reported in "Navajoland: The Death of a Daily" (CJR, September/October 1987), MacDonald sent tribal police to close the *Times* shortly after his November 1986 election as chairman of the Navajo tribe. The paper, under Trahant's direction as editor, had been critical of MacDonald and had endorsed his opponent; MacDonald claimed the paper was losing too much money to be kept alive.



CJR/Monty Roessel

NEW WINDOW: *The staff of* The Navajo Nation Today, *from left, Vincent Craig, Mark Trahant, Monty Roessel, and LeNora Begay at Window Rock, Arizona*

Since then, MacDonald has been disgraced, sentenced to six years in tribal jail for misuse of tribal office for personal gain. And on May 8, Trahant and his partners began publishing *The Navajo Nation Today*, an independently owned weekly they say will probe issues on the Navajo Reservation with a depth missing from newspapers that share the market: the daily Gallup, New Mexico, *Independent* and Trahant's alma mater, the *Times*, which MacDonald had reopened as a weekly later in 1987.

Jerry Kammer

TURKEY'S PRESS "REFORMS"

Turkish journalist Veli Yilmaz, sentenced to 748 years for being the editor of a Marxist magazine ("Behind Turkey's New Face," CJR, November /December, 1990), was released last spring after serving ten years in prison. His release was part of a limited general amnesty that followed the Turkish parliament's repeal of penal code articles that in effect banned publications critical of the government.

The amnesty comes at a time when Turkey is trying to improve its human-rights image in order to improve its chances of being accepted as a member of the European Community. Many laws restricting freedom of speech, including some banning communist, Islamic fundamentalist, and Kurdish publications, have also been repealed.

The long-fettered Turkish press may actually fare worse, however. The "Anti-Terrorist Law," which was recently passed by parliament, "so broadly defines terrorism that two people calling for economic reforms could be prosecuted," according to Aliza Marcus, who covered Yilmaz's story for CJR.

Jonathan Grogins

Jerry Kammer is a reporter for The Arizona Republic. *Jonathan Grogins is an intern at* CJR.

FOLLOW THE (DRUG) MONEY

◆

WHERE TO GET SOME DIRT ON MONEY-LAUNDERING

Tracking the money-launderers, who each year alchemize uncounted billions in ill-gotten gains into legitimate assets, proves difficult enough for the government. It's a more daunting challenge for journalists, whose knowledge of accounting procedures is often only skin deep and whose editors are loath to send them out on investigations that may produce little in the way of results.

Since the fall of 1989, however, some much-needed instruction has been available in the pages of an aggressive monthly newsletter published in Miami called *Money Laundering Alert*. Founded by Charles A. Intriago, a forty-nine-year-old native of Ecuador who worked as an assistant U.S. attorney in Florida and as counsel to a House subcommittee in Washington overseeing regulatory agencies, the publication guides readers through the proliferating maze of government regulations designed to frustrate laundering. It also monitors the latest scams used for hiding cash.

> **"The BCCI scandal was an opportunity, conveniently located in one institution, to expose a whole variety of illegal contacts"**

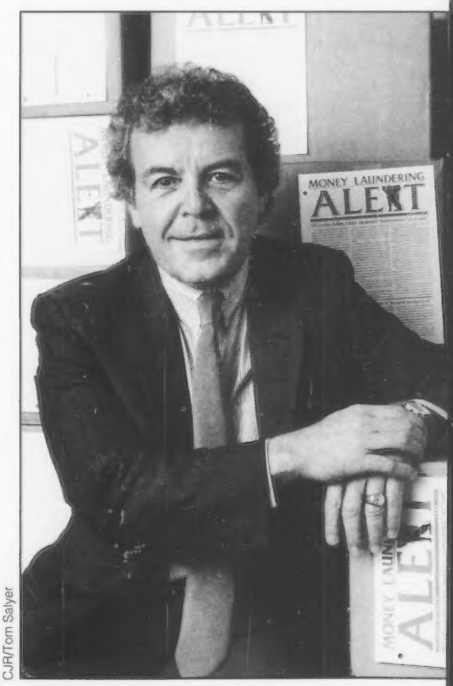
Begun strictly as a trade sheet for bankers and for lawyers trying to position clients just a shade to the right side of the law — "It's worth a lot to people to keep from going to jail," says Intriago, who charges his 1,200 subscribers $295 a year — the eight-page newsletter has in recent months also won a loyal following among a small group of journalists whose field of concentration lies somewhere between the police beat and the financial page. Last December, for instance, *The New York Times* gave prominent display to a classified report leaked to Intriago by a source at the Treasury Department that was embarrassingly critical of the Bush administration for its failure, after two years of lackluster efforts, to get only one of the twenty foreign countries targeted for money-laundering by the Treasury Department to help the United States track the export of drug dollars — this from an administration that had vowed to be the toughest ever on drugs. Earlier, just before the invasion of Panama, Cable News Network picked up a story Intriago broke about how U.S. intelligence agencies were using sophisticated electronic monitoring devices to watch how General Manuel Noriega was providing money-laundering services to the Colombia drug cartels.

More recently, in the case of the growing scandal involving the Bank of Credit and Commerce International, journalistic organizations on both sides of the ocean, from the BBC to the *Los Angeles Times*, have been on the phone to Intriago, asking him to explain the nuances of a story he had been covering for more than a year and a half. (His first piece on the BCCI ran in February 1990.) "I think the press really missed the boat on this one," he says. "Here was an opportunity, conveniently located in one institution, to expose a whole variety of illegal contacts."

"I can't say every time I read [the newsletter] I pick up a story," says Jim Savage, the editor in charge of investigations for *The Miami Herald*. "But Charlie works very hard and the newsletter is an easy way to keep on top of the field."

One reason many journalists have ignored the laundering story is that the big players — Mafia kingpins, drug lords, crooked politicians and businessmen — often confine their operations to exotic off-shore banks. Another is that, on shore, in cities like Miami and New York, the schemes are usually a lot more difficult to recognize than, say, a holdup on the street. "The key," says Intriago, "is always to get your money into something that will give you a return on your investment without divulging the source of the money. That's the trick." A neat trick indeed, given just the weight of the stuff. Adding up only the profits generated by illegal drugs, which the most conservative government estimate puts at $40 billion a year — and considering, according to Intriago, that $1 million packed away in stacks of $20 bills tips the scales at about 113 pounds — the bulk amount that launderers need to get

CASH FLOW: *Charles Intriago and his* Money Laundering Alert



CJR/Tom Selyer

rid of adds up to several tons *a day*.

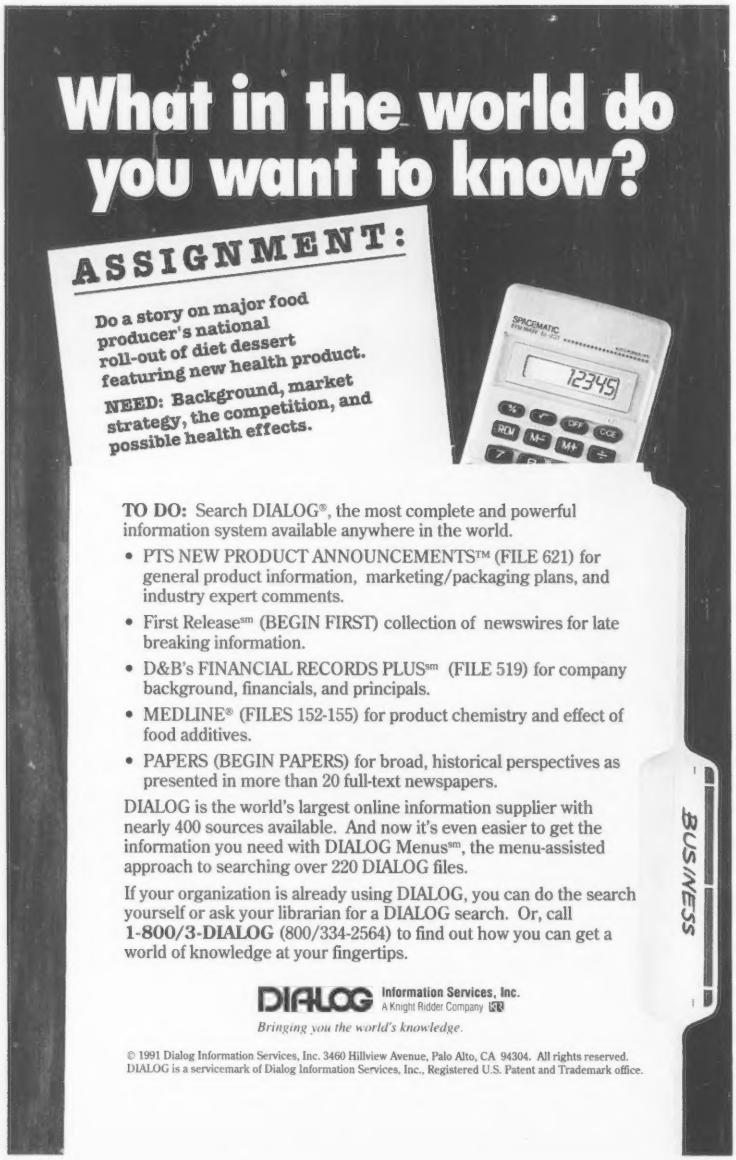
One course — the riskiest, considering that bulk — is simply to ship the cash out of the country and deposit it anonymously in banks abroad. As spelled out in the *Alert*, however, money-laundering has increasingly worked its way into Main Street, USA. In some cases, for instance, the launderers divide their money into bundles of less than $10,000 — the lowest limit on cash deposits or purchases that must be reported to the IRS — and parcel them out to "Smurfs," named for those industrious little blue cartoon characters, who in turn deposit them in hundreds of banks throughout the country. With growing frequency, launderers have also been doing their washing through small businesses, such as real estate companies, car dealerships, jewelers, art galleries — anywhere they can find someone willing to sell something expensive that will hold or increase its value and who will agree to take payment in cash.

Last fall, in a story that showed how alarmingly pervasive laundering had become in the U.S., Intriago wrote about a sting operation conducted by the General Accounting Office, which gave agents $4 million and sent them out to nine cities, offering large handfuls of cash for merchandise if the sellers would agree not to report the transaction to the government. Of the seventy-nine businesses approached, only three refused to break the law. "Well, I have to put a name down and a telephone number," apologized one car dealer after a peek at the $23,000 one agent flashed him for a restored Corvette. "But whatever name and phone number you give me is okay. You can even use Mickey Mouse."

The *Alert* publishes from twelve to fifteen stories a month, which Intriago writes himself with the help of two secretaries, a law-student intern, and a stringer in Washington. He views the sheet as less a crusade than a business venture — it began turning a profit after three months, he says — and tries to get stories picked up by the press as a way of advertising his usefulness to business clients.

"I'd like to build an aura about us so that when we speak, people listen, like *The New England Journal of Medicine*," he says.

Maybe some day. For now, most of his stories deal with topics a little too technical or trade-oriented to interest the general press. Nor does the *Alert* provide a real how-to manual on investigating laundering scams. But using sources cultivated from his days in Washington, Intriago often comes up with a tip about where journalists might profitably at least look for a story. A year ago, for instance, he ran a piece about federal agencies that guaranteed bank loans to farmers in the Midwest and that, during the agricultural crisis of the 1980s, became weighted down with an unwanted inventory of foreclosed acreage. To get rid of it, his sources told him, not a few county agents were suspected of selling the property to anybody with cash, cocaine kings included. As Intriago explains it, a launderer would approach an agricultural agent and propose to buy a piece of land for,



say, $200,000 if, in return for a kickback of a few thousand, the agent would not report that the payment was made in cash. "You can rest assured," Intriago quoted his source as saying, "that there are farms out there that have been bought by people who don't fit that famous American Gothic painting."

Bruce Porter

Porter, a contributing editor of CJR, *is at work on* The Medellín Connection, *to be published by HarperCollins.*

CRUEL AND UNUSUAL?

PRISON EDITORS HELP PULL THE PLUG ON AN ELECTRIC CHAIR

Robert Wayne Williams — a photo of whose badly burned head is shown here — was executed in the electric chair at the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola in 1983. Publication of this and other post-execution pictures of Williams's body last year in *The Angolite*, Louisiana's award-winning inmate-run magazine, has helped stop the use of electrocution as Louisiana's method of execution. A new law mandates that, as of September 15, capital punishment in the state will be administered by lethal injection.

Williams was the first inmate from Louisiana's death row executed after a twenty-two year hiatus. *Angolite* co-editor Ron Wikberg, in a nineteen-page history of the electric chair in the September/October 1990 issue, compared the photographs of Williams with those of nine inmates executed by electric chair in Florida, which temporarily suspended electrocutions after the botched execution of Jesse Tafero on May 4, 1990. "A comparison of the photographs ... shows an unmistakable similarity in the degree of mutilation," Wikberg wrote.

Medical experts who viewed the photos at the request of *The Angolite* identified first, second, third, and fourth degree burns on Williams's body. "Execution by electrocution is extremely painful," Dr. Harold Hillman, a British expert on execution, told *The Angolite*, not only because of burning, but because body fluids "must have heated up to a temperature close to the boiling point of water in order to generate the steam" that witnesses often see. He also asserted that "there is no scientific evidence whatsoever to support the notion that a person being electrocuted loses consciousness."

The photographs, taken by Williams's family, were discovered last year by attorneys for the Loyola Death Penalty Resource Center. After the publication of the photographs and after the passage of the new law, the Louisiana Pardon Board recommended a postponement of execution for convicted murderer Andrew Lee Jones, in order to delay the execution until after the September 15 deadline. Governor Buddy Roemer, however, rejected the delay, saying that Jones "deserves what he is about to get." A Baton Rouge television reporter who witnessed Jones's July 23 execution reported smoke coming from the temple electrode. (As CJR went to press, two more electric chair executions were tentatively scheduled for August.)

Some observers credit the passage of the law outlawing electrocution to the backing of prosecuting attorneys, who wanted a less objectionable form of execution in order to win more death-penalty verdicts from juries. But the editors of *The Angolite* — Wikberg and Wilbert Rideau — also get credit. By focusing attention on the electric chair issue, says Burk Foster, a professor of criminology at the University of Southwestern Louisiana, who has co-authored a textbook on the Louisiana correctional system with the two prison editors, they made it "more and more difficult to sell electrocution to Louisiana juries"

> **"There is no scientific evidence to support the notion that a person being electrocuted loses consciousness"**

Twelve states, meanwhile, still use the electric chair. These include Georgia, Florida, Virginia, and Alabama — four of the six states that perform the most executions (Louisiana and Texas are the others). Eight hundred and eighty-two death-row prisoners now face electrocution.

Wendell Smith

Smith is a researcher for Spy *magazine.*



courtesy *The Angolite*

ELECTROCUTED: *A photo of the badly burned head of Robert Wayne Williams, as published in the Louisiana prison magazine* The Angolite

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COVER STORY

A FOCUS-GROUP MEMBER TELLS ALL

A woman approached me on New York City's Avenue of the Americas, pen and clipboard in hand. Was this a Moonie? She was young and perky. I was older and was breathing. Which was about the only thing she required.

"Would you be interested in participating in a Time-Life marketing survey?" she asked. "We'll give you a nice free gift."

"How nice is nice?" I said.

"Pretty nice," she replied.

I followed her into the vast Time-Life building, into an elevator, and down a long, dim hallway. I was told to sit and wait on a plastic chair next to two other female inductees, both clutching shopping bags. We glanced at each other, shamefaced. We didn't want to admit we had come this far for a free mystery gift.

Next we were ushered into a small, windowless room filled with chairs and tables. On the tables lay push-button gizmos, sheets of paper, and number two pencils. "You will be shown slides," a voice said from behind us. Our job was to vote our preferences by pushing buttons.

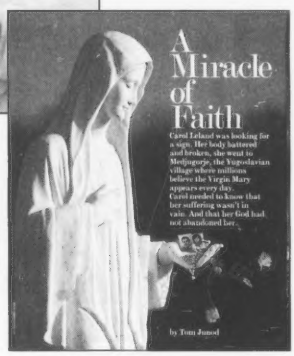
The first slides asked us to categorize ourselves, in terms of our age, marital and parental status, education level, and the number of magazines we purchased each month. (The third slide included the word "separate," spelled s-e-p-e-r-a-t-e.) We were asked to push a red button as soon as we could spot three magazines — *People*, *Time*, *Life* — out of a hodgepodge of about a dozen publications sandwiched together the way they might appear on a newsstand. Then two different *Life* covers flashed on the screen, both concerning the same story: a sighting of the Virgin Mary on a hillside in Yugoslavia.

Which cover photo did we prefer — the one with a woman holding up a child to kiss the hand of the Virgin Mary statue? Or the one with the same statue alone, facing the opposite direction?

I voted for the woman and child, all the while wondering just how far this finger-to-the-wind journalism had gone. (All the way to titles, I would learn later; according to a source at *Rolling Stone*, Jann Wenner's new men's magazine, due to appear in a year or so, remains unnamed after the first title Wenner picked wasn't a hit with a focus group.) What's next, I wondered: a booth in every mall, where shoppers vote for more stories on Dolly Parton or plastic surgery or women who love men who once loved women who hate men?



TAKE YOUR PIC ...



The lights went on. We had a few moments to jot down some of our thoughts. Then we were led past cardboard boxes to a cluttered desk. We were given a choice between a sports-blooper video, a photo frame, and a pocket calculator. I took the calculator and ran.

I forgot about the incident until July, when I went to my favorite newsstand, and there it was, the cover I'd chosen: the "Do You Believe in Miracles?" story, with the photo of the child kissing the statue. On page twenty-eight was the picture I had voted against.

I won! I guess.

Amy Linn

Linn is a free-lance writer in New York City.

COPS AND CAMERAS

WHY TV IS SLOW TO COVER POLICE BRUTALITY

In July, four months after members of the Los Angeles Police Department were seen beating Rodney King on national television, an independent commission appointed to examine persistent charges that the department is prone to brutality against blacks and other minorities delivered its findings. A "significant number" of LAPD members, the Christopher Commission reported, "repetitively use excessive force." Among the messages — typed on patrol-car computers between late 1989 and early 1991 — that the commission made public was this one: "Capture him, beat him, treat him like dirt."

If the commission is correct, it seems fair to ask: where was the press?

Covering police misconduct has always posed a problem for reporters, who sometimes form a symbiotic relationship with the cops. Television reporters, with their need for images and on-camera interviews, have had a particularly tough time covering the subject. A look at some history may help to explain why it wasn't a TV news crew but an amateur photographer who last March brought police brutality to national attention.

● In 1977 and 1978, Wayne Satz, a reporter for KABC-TV in Los Angeles, aired a series of reports alleging numerous instances of police abuse, among them cases involving the shooting of unarmed suspects. The series, which included an interview with a masked LAPD officer, described incidents of brutality by fellow members of the force. It earned the station a Peabody award — and the wrath of two Los Angeles police chiefs, Ed Davis and his successor, Daryl Gates, who is expected to retire next year.

It wasn't only the chiefs who were furious, Satz says; letter writers deluged the station with complaints, he began receiving death threats, his name appeared on bumper stickers ("Satz Sucks"), and, he says, officers used his likeness on the targets of their pistol ranges.

Satz attributes part of the fury to the fact that "there was an enormous disparity between the image of the cops on TV" — a reference to such police-action series as *Dragnet* and *Adam 12*, whose producer once kept LAPD officers on his payroll as advisers — "and the cops we were talking about on the news."

Satz adds that, while his station "never blinked" in the face of police and other opposition to his reports, "I felt very lonely back then because no one else in the news media — electronic or print — was jumping into the fray." Satz, who is now a TV commentator on the media, offers an explanation for this widespread reluctance: "If you're in the TV news racket, your principal goal is to be loved, and it is self-destructive to give viewers unsettling information, particularly to tell viewers that their confidence in their police force might be misplaced."



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● Back in 1967, Roger Grimsby, then anchor and news director of KGO-TV in San Francisco, recalled a news judgment he made of the sort that few newspeople today would talk about in public. Grimsby, who went on to become anchor at WABC-TV in New York and is now retired, was addressing a meeting of California Associated Press broadcasters. In his speech Grimsby said that earlier that year he had been allotted funds to hire an additional news crew and that he had decided to use it to cover San Francisco at night.

Grimsby told his audience that, during their very first week in the field, the crew picked up a police call about a drug deal in progress in the Haight-Ashbury area. Arriving at the scene, the KGO-TV crew began filming the arrest of a luckless "hippy" (as Grimsby described him) being tackled, wrestled to the ground, and beaten by arresting officers. The camera operator then moved in as one of the officers walked up to the suspect and "gratuitously" (again Grimsby's word) kicked him in the head. The crew then returned to the studio, where the film was developed, edited, and shown to Grimsby, who in his speech, recalled that he was faced with a dilemma.



The Bettmann Archive

"I knew I had a great piece of film," he said. "But at the same time I knew that our nighttime crew would not be able to operate effectively without the full cooperation of the San Francisco Police Department. And that film almost certainly would jeopardize our relationship." He decided to kill the piece, he said, adding that police had

YO! YOUTH

◆

THOSE YOUNG-READER PAGES: A REPORT CARD

Newspapers throughout the country have trouble attracting young readers, but *The Wall Street Journal* has a special problem. Some young people perceive the *Journal*, as one editor put it, as "a newspaper written for yuppie millionaires."

This September the *Journal* is launching *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition*, the most ambitious attempt yet to reach the next generation. The twenty-four-page monthly, unlike its parent, will be tabloid size, with color and large graphics. Its editorial content, however, will be made up almost entirely of articles straight from the pages of the *Journal*, a strategy that may not always set the youth of America abuzz.

Take, for example, these sentences found in the prototype issue:

● "Treasury bonds are a good place to invest now," says ... a hedge-fund manager in Dallas, who adds that interest rates "will plummet" as "safe-haven money pours into the dollar."

● Dow Jones's market-weighted index of aerospace and defense stocks surged about 2.3% on the Monday after the [Scud missile] attack, while profit taking sapped the rest of the market.

Such prose seems to be aimed right at the sons of yuppie millionaires. Aren't they already reading *The Wall Street Journal*?

A number of other newspapers are trying to reach out to young readers. Here's a sampling, complete with one youth's evaluations.

Akron Beacon Journal: "YO! Kids"

D+

Appearing in the *Akron Beacon Journal*'s entertainment and life-style section since April, YO! Kids makes no pretense at covering news. It features a Bits 'N' Pieces department, with two-inch stories on topics ranging from Whitney Houston to college aid. For readers with longer attention spans, the page generally offers an article on celebrities, music, and fashion ("Two-piece swimsuits are in for gals. But these days, manufacturers are taking pains to use bustier tops, underwire bras, and other devices to accommodate less-than-perfect-figures.")

YO! Kids needs a makeover.

Detroit Free Press: "News For Young Readers"

B

Only eight inches long, the News For Young Readers column has been answering youngsters' questions on virtually any topic since it started in January. It's simple, concise, and a worthwhile read for people who want straightforward answers to straightforward questions, such as these recent samples:

● When will the people of Kuwait and Iraq be able to go out of their houses in spite of all the pollution?

● How come the Detroit Pistons do not have a cheerleading team?

● How did the Turtles get to be so popular?

Reporters answer the questions deftly, in a clear, uncomplicated manner. The column has caught on with youngsters — and with people not so young. Maybe its name should be changed?

Newsday: "Student Briefing Page On The News"

A-

Newsday's Student Briefing Page, which made its debut in February, is highly interactive and highly interesting. "The premise is that once a reader can viscerally respond to something on a page, the information is theirs," says Bill Zimmerman, its editor. The main parts of the page are a column that gives a historical perspective on a development or issue in the news, a feature on some person in the news, and a third section that often encourages readers to write letters — "Imagine you had Iraqi pen pals. What would you write to them?" — or draw pictures on that day's theme. Some of these efforts are later published.

In recent days the page has tackled the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the U.S. Census report and what it reveals about the nation, and the history of the Soviet Union's current crisis. The only time the page seems to miss the mark is when its "Challenger" quiz is too chal-

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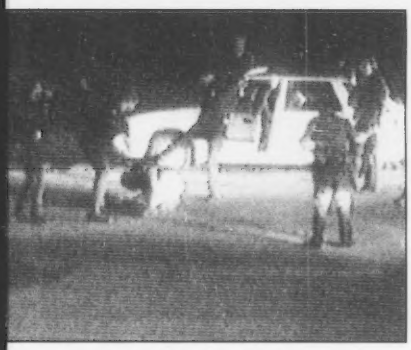
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GOOD COPS, BAD COPS: *Jack Webb and the Los Angeles TV police of* Dragnet *(left); and Los Angeles Police Department members beating Rodney King*

lenging. Should high school students really be expected to identify the republics of Yugoslavia?

Syracuse Herald-Journal: *hj* A-

The Syracuse *Herald-Journal*'s magazine *hj* bills itself as "Something Else," and since its debut in October 1989 each issue has indeed been offering teenagers one substantial story not likely to be found elsewhere. In the center of the twelve-page publication is "The Big Story," a feature that addresses difficult issues facing teenagers today. The Big Story has recently examined what it's like to be a gay teenager, the stereotypes that members of various racial minorities must cope with, and the lives of high school dropouts.

Quotes from teenagers in The Big Story are eye-opening and honest. For example:

- I live on the North Side, and if something happens in my neighborhood, if something gets stolen, I'm the first person they accuse because I'm black.
- I think if I had stayed in school I wouldn't have had to live in a U-haul truck for a summer. I don't think I did so well.

Unfortunately, there's not too much surrounding The Big Story, aside from some interesting student-written music and movie reviews. The Big Story, however, is solid enough to sustain the publication.

Evan M. Silverman

Silverman, a youth, is an intern at CJR.

later tipped off his crew about a stakeout of an armed robbery at a downtown motel. KGO's coverage of that incident had resulted in high ratings and some prestigious journalism awards, he pointed out. Contacted recently, Grimsby said tersely, "A reporter has to remain in the good graces of the police."

- While journalists over the years have exchanged stories about the pressure police sometimes bring to bear to protect their image in the press, stories about intimidation rarely make it into print. A notable exception was a December 21, 1990, report in the *San Diego Union* and *Tribune* alleging that Michael Tuck, a former San Diego anchor who moved to KCBS-TV in Los Angeles last year, had been the target of a "political" police investigation. The paper claimed that after Tuck had broadcast a series of commentaries criticizing San Diego police chief Bob Burgreen for his handling of allegations of police misconduct, the police made Tuck the subject of intensive surveillance, including the taking of aerial photographs of his home. Tuck was quoted by the newspaper as saying, "They didn't find anything. Believe me, if they had, they would have used it against me." (Burgreen later parried questions concerning the alleged surveillance, saying only that his department may investigate possible criminal conduct by anyone and, if after doing so "we determine there is no reason to prosecute the person, we do not disclose that information.")

Tom Reddin, who served as chief of the LAPD from 1967 to 1969, is the only police chief of a major city to become a television anchor (at KTLA) after leaving office. Speaking of the Christopher Commission, Reddin says, "What I hope will result from the investigation is a loosening of the flow of information regarding disciplinary procedures. Daryl [Gates] may talk about 'my policemen,' but they are really the people's policemen, and the people have a right to know about how their policemen perform their duties."

Lew Irwin

Irwin is a veteran Los Angeles television and radio reporter.

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CAPITAL LETTER

DAN QUAYLE: THE SEQUEL

BY WILLIAM BOOT

This is the story of a sudden breakthrough in the news media's understanding and appreciation of Vice-President Dan Quayle. Quayle was resurrected politically by the Washington press corps during this past spring and summer, elevated abruptly from buffoon to serious news subject. His comeback should provide hope to other politicians, perhaps including 1992 presidential aspirants who feel they have been buried too soon by the morticians of campaign journalism. On the other hand, Quayle's revival may disturb the sleep of those who would prefer not to be governed by a man who once blurted that he didn't live in the twentieth century.

CAMPAIGN '92

As of early May, Quayle was a standing joke for Washington reporters. They had all but zipped up the body bag on his 1996 presidential hopes. For some time, in fact, they had devoted their occasional vice-presidential coverage to such matters as Dan Quayle wristwatches ("The numbers are not in the traditional spots. They're not even in any particular order" — *Los Angeles Times*, May 20, 1990); dismal Dan Quayle opinion polls (only 23 percent of the public wanted Bush to retain him as a running mate, according to the March 4, 1991, *New York Times*); and Dan Quayle jokes (since December 1988 there have been at least 300 references to Quayle jokes in over a dozen major news outlets, from the *Chicago Tribune* to *The Independent* of London).

The original Quayle-as-dolt model was forged at the 1988 Republican convention, when the just-anointed Quayle burst onto our TV screens, slapping George Bush on the back and jumping about like a hyperactive child. In short order, journalists had reported on such deficiencies as his academic record (he was reported to have failed his political science comprehensive exam and to have been given a special, substitute exam), his amazingly low score on a National Guard communications skills test (he reportedly scored a 56, when the average score was 75), and how he allegedly had to pull strings to get into law school.

Once the "dim Dan" model was accepted, there followed a period in which reporters sought to discover just *how* dim. Quayle's periodic gaffes were, of course, one potential indicator, so they were chronicled in some detail. When he addressed the United Negro College Fund, whose slogan is "A mind is a terrible thing to waste," Quayle said: "... you take the United Negro College Fund model that what a waste it is to lose one's mind or not to have a mind is being very wasteful. How true that is." *The New York Times* (June 25, 1989) and at least forty other publications picked up that remark. At least nine news organizations, including *The Boston Globe*, *Time*, and *Newsweek*, trumpeted Quayle's 1989 comment in Hawaii on the state's strategic importance: "Hawaii has always been a very pivotal role in the Pacific. It is part of the United States that is an island that is right here." The *Chicago Tribune* and other publications were quick to recycle Quayle's November 18, 1989, astronomical observation: "Mars is essentially in the same orbit ... somewhat the same distance from the sun, which is very important. We have seen pictures where there are canals, we believe, and water. If there is water, that means there is oxygen. Oxygen, that means we can breathe."

In attempting to measure the limits of Quayle's brainpower, Hendrik Hertzberg of *The New Republic* (October 31, 1988) once got the man to size himself up. The two were discussing books, and Quayle recalled that Machiavelli, in *The Prince*, had set out three classes of mind among leaders. The first were creative and could lead independently. The second were not creative, but were able to lead by selecting good subordinates. Quayle continued: "And the third class of people didn't really know much of anything. And they were the worst kind of leaders, because not only were they not creative, but they didn't know what was right or wrong and they just sort of went by whatever they felt like. I've tried to figure out where I am. I know I'm not the first one because I don't think I have the creativeness ... I'm somewhere between two and one." Hertzberg implied that a ranking rather lower on the scale was actually in order.



CJR/Arnold Roth

Diane Sawyer and Sam Donaldson probed Quayle's mind further on the August 17, 1989, broadcast of ABC's *Prime Time Live*. Their undisguised theme was: Just how dumb? Some excerpts:

DONALDSON: ... when you were talking about the Holocaust, you said it was the most obscene chapter in our history, meaning this country. Was that just nervousness?...

QUAYLE: I have had hundreds of news conferences. I've made hundreds of speeches. I have made a few misstatements. And unfortunately you all take those misstatements and bring

William Boot is the pen name of Christopher Hanson, Washington correspondent for the Seattle Post-Intelligencer.

them back up and put them back on the air. The thing in my profession is that there are no retakes in my business. And I stand by all the misstatements that I've made....

(Audience now sees video bite of Quayle's United Negro College Fund blooper.)

SAWYER: When you watch it again, replayed on television, do you cringe?...

QUAYLE: Well, now Sam has one misstatement, you have the second misstatement, I presume you have a third one that I've had on my mind....

DONALDSON: Which one do you have in mind?

QUAYLE: Never mind ... [Quayle adds at this point that he has made only three misstatements over the past year.]

DONALDSON: Mr. Vice-President, is your wife smarter than you are?

QUAYLE: You know something, Sam? I'm smart enough not to answer a question like that...."

Indeed he was. That refusal seemed to provide at least some sort of answer to "Just how dumb?": Dumb enough to appear on the show; not dumb enough to answer Sam's question.

After about a year in office, Quayle seemed to become less prone to verbal gaffery. Partly as a result of that, and partly because of his relatively innocuous vice-presidential duties, he was not in the news at all for days or weeks at a time. *The Washington Post*'s Joel Achenback provided the standard explanation for this lack of exposure in an article last May 7: " Dan Quayle needs so little coverage because there seems to be nothing left to discover about him."

How wrong Achenback proved to be! For suddenly, starting on the very day his article appeared, journalists began uncovering new Quayle qualities, abilities, talents, and hidden depths. In a May 7 *New York Times* column that appears to have signaled the shift, no less a figure than A.M. Rosenthal described Quayle as able and sophisticated. Rosenthal declared: "He has made one speech after another that is carefully thought out, hard-minded, but idealistic, a credit to any officeholder." *Time* magazine, although tough on Quayle, revealed that, on trips abroad, Quayle had displayed "considerable diplomatic skill" and that officials credit him with being "quick, well-read, and hardworking (May 20)." The *Los Angeles Times* (May 9, page 1) told readers: "By all accounts, Quayle has acquitted himself admirably as vice-president. He has been a loyal adviser at the White House, an effective partisan on the stump ... and a persuasive advocate on Capitol Hill." *U.S. News & World Report* (May 20) reported that Quayle (in Bush's absence) had convened top advisers to respond to a Philippines coup crisis in 1989, that he had shifted the administration's space priorities to increase unmanned exploration, and that he had worked deftly behind the scenes to weaken EPA anti-pollution rules, much to the satisfaction of conservatives and corporations.

> **"Suddenly journalists began uncovering new Quayle qualities, abilities, talents, and hidden depths"**

Before long, Quayle was right where his media advisers maintained that he should have been from the start: he was being cited as a weighty news source and a serious aspirant for the 1996 Republican presidential nomination. In a front-page, above-the-fold July 5 *Washington Post* article by none other than Bob Woodward, Quayle was quoted as a respected authority on Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas. (QUAYLE SAYS THOMAS CAN SHUN QUERIES ... "'I would imagine that Judge Thomas will not answer that specific question [on abortion], nor is he obligated to answer that question,' Quayle said during an interview on Air Force Two.") Two days earlier, the *Post* had run a front-page story describing how Quayle had played a key role in the White House decision to select Thomas. *The Wall Street Journal*, meanwhile, reported that Quayle (evidently buoyed by more favorable press coverage) appeared to be improving his standing with voters in one of the major primary states: "Aides are heartened by a California poll showing that, for the first time, those with a favorable opinion of him narrowly outnumber those with a negative view. His Asian and East European trips came off without visible gaffes..."(June 14). Quayle was becoming a contender.

The shift in press perception of Dan Quayle's abilities and intelligence did not take place gradually, nor was it simply a modification of earlier views. The change was nothing less than revolutionary. In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas S. Kuhn, the physicist and philosopher, describes how the advance of science alternates between normal and revolutionary phases. Judging by the news coverage of Quayle, things appear to work much the same way in journalism. According to Kuhn, normal science entails routine experimentation to test the limits of an accepted hypothesis or "paradigm." This is also what takes place in normal



CJR/Arnold Roth

news reporting. Take as an example accounts of John Sununu's impressive intellect. Reporting on this subject started with the accepted truth that Sununu was brilliant. Reporters then simply fine-tuned our understanding of this. As *The Washington Post* recently charted the coverage: around 1985, news outlets put Sununu's I.Q. at 170; in March 1989, the London *Daily Telegraph* pegged it at 176; by the spring of 1990 the score was 180, according to the *The New York Times* and *The Boston Globe*. Reporters had found that Sununu's brainpower was actually increasing (it had gone up ten points or 6 percent over five years) — an interesting discovery, but not one that altered fundamental perceptions of the man.

By contrast, Quayle's I.Q. practically doubled during the month of May alone, judging by the press coverage. Journalists did not have access to Quayle's test scores, to be sure. But one can infer from their reporting that some put his I.Q. at, say, 65 during the Dan-as-joke phase ending May 6. In the post-joke phase, beginning May 7, his score seems to have surged to perhaps 130.

Kuhn describes changes in perception of this magnitude in the world of science as paradigm shifts. One such revolutionary shift occurred after Copernicus and Galileo set forth startling evidence that the earth revolved around the sun. This ultimately transformed the view of the solar system, shattering the earlier paradigm in which the sun was thought to revolve around the earth. Just such a gestalt switch took place in the press's perception of Dan Quayle.

Why was the old Quayle paradigm shattered? Quite simply, because Bush, on May 4, was sent to the hospital with atrial fibrillation, the irregular heartbeat heard 'round the world. The initial press reaction to this illness was "My God! Quayle!" — to wit, QUAYLE JOKES NOT FUNNY NOW (*Miami Herald*, May 6). But almost immediately the news media began a frenetic upward revision of Quayle's abilities. Why? Jeffrey Frank of *The Washington Post* suggested one explanation: "All of us know fellow mortals capable, in certain circumstances, of stunning spurts toward wisdom. Among them are any IRS agent who happens to be auditing us, various directors of school admission, Gerald Ford, and some editors at my newspaper." By this view, reporters had discovered a pragmatic truth about Quayle, influenced by such considerations as the need to have access to him if he reached the highest office.

I suspect, however, that for a good number of Washington reporters the new line on Quayle is also a matter of deeper, belated insight as to his talents. Many Washington journalists revere power. They understand that it is the ultimate commodity in this city, and have learned by long experience that power transforms what it touches. Thus, anyone who has a lot of power or is close to having it simply cannot be dull-witted: If they were, how could they ever have gotten as far as they did? Once many reporters accepted the reality that Quayle was, indeed, a heartbeat away from the presidency (and it took Bush's own heartbeat scare to drive this point home), they could not help but observe the vice-president in a new light. They could not help but discover new dimensions in the man. ◆

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DARTS AND LAURELS

◆ **LAUREL** to *Connecticut* magazine, for a nonroutine examination of an unhealthy policy. Checking up on that ever-so-responsible GE commercial that stresses the value of early detection in breast-cancer treatment, urges busy women to make time for regular mammograms, and, along the way, promotes GE's newly developed breast-cancer-detection system, associate editor Nora FitzGerald discovered a sign of not-so-benign neglect: the company that "brings good things to life" was disallowing payment for mammograms in its employees' medical plan — unless the employee showed symptoms of cancer already. What's more, the Fairfield-headquartered company appeared to be immune to both the letter and the spirit of the Connecticut state law that mandates such preventive screenings: GE's medical plan — a plan for all its employees nationally — was conveniently issued in another state. (FitzGerald's piece ran in May; in July, GE announced that the plan would be expanded to cover routine mammograms.)

◆ **DART** to the Philadelphia *Daily News*, for a detour around the news. When repairs that had long closed a Center City street were finally completed on May 13, the tabloid devoted its entire front page, as well as its entire third page, to the news of the reopening — and, not incidentally, to news of an upcoming paper-sponsored celebration, a giant "YO! Philadelphia" block party featuring, among other delights, a YO! mug-toss game, a YO!deling contest, YO! T-shirts, and yo-yos. Subsequent coverage of the party was similarly loaded with YO!s: on the *News*'s front page, in photo captions and headlines, and in inside stories (some sixteen YO!s in one May 18 piece alone). YO!, as the paper reminded its readers (lest they miss the point?) is also the name of the paper's new entertainment section.

◆ **LAUREL** to *Time* magazine and associate editor Richard Behar, for a mindchilling status report on the Church of Scientology and its continuing spread into the mainstream. Based on 150 interviews and a review of hundreds of documents, Behar's May 6 cover story showed how, despite the abundant testimony of defectors about physical abuse, mind control, and financial ruin; despite the indictment, prosecution, or conviction, both in the U.S. and abroad, of numerous Scientologists for extortion, burglary, wiretapping, tax evasion, and fraud; and despite the death of its founder, science fiction writer L. Ron Hubbard, in 1986 (just as he was about to be indicted), Scientology — a "ruthless ... hugely profitable global racket," as *Time* put it— not only survives, but thrives. It does so, Behar revealed, with the help of "Mafia-like" tactics, First Amendment protections, big-name celebrity followers, advice from Hill and Knowlton (which has since dropped the account), income from fees for "flowing up the bridge" (to enlightenment) that average from $200,000 to $400,000 a person, and a wide array of front organizations (which Behar named) in the fields of consulting, health care, book publishing, and education. (In a sidebar Behar detailed Scientology's attempts to threaten, harass, and discredit him during his five-month investigation — attempts that clearly did not work.)

◆ **DART** to Al Neuharth, erstwhile chairman of Gannett and current columnist for Gannett's *USA Today*, for journalistic inosmia. When the Church of Scientology, stung by a *Time* exposé (see above), counterattacked with a $3 million two-week barrage of full-page, four-color, anti-*Time* ads, as well as a twenty-eight page, four-color anti-*Time* supplement, in *USA Today*, Neuharth sniffed around the subject in a June 21 column in which he told his readers how "amused" he was by the *Time*-Scientology "debate," likening it to a fight between "the pot and the kettle" in which "neither is better than the other." Just as "the Church of Scientology is not really a religion; it's a cult or philosophy," Neuharth analogized, "*Time* really isn't a newsmagazine; it's a magazine of opinion and interpretation." He went on: "I have absolutely no doubt" about why "*Time* and its parent company" don't pass "my smell test" (one of his reasons: the value of Neuharth's Time Inc. stock would be higher today "if the bosses two years ago" had not "rejected Paramount's $200 a share offer and feathered their own nests"). But while allowing as how Scientology doesn't pass his "smell test" either, the Plain Talk writer temporized, "I'm not absolutely sure why." (Did the sweet perfume of that $3 million ad campaign in *USA Today* mask the stench? Maybe Neuharth should go back to Behar's piece and take another whiff.)

◆ **DART** to the Atlantic City, New Jersey, *Press*, and staff writer David Spatz, for letting journalistic credibility take a back seat — and putting advertising behind the wheel. In an effort to sell more used cars, truck, vans, campers, pick-ups, and cycles, *The Press* in tandem with Sammons Communications, the local cable operator, is offering a "one low price" combination deal in which private sellers get a three-line classified ad in *The Press* and a thirty-second do-it-yourself commercial on Sammons's Channel 2. For the "camera shy," the paper's July 9 announcement promised, its entertainment writer, David Spatz, would be at the warehouse drive-in studio "to help you (along with the lovely Darlene) ... or, if you prefer not to be on camera, David and Darlene will do the on-camera selling!" The deal also calls for each commercial to be aired five times on the VideoCar Bazaar, with "David" as regular host.

◆ **DART** to the Anchorage, Alaska, *Times*, for a clas-

sic example of hot-air journalism. The front page of the paper's June 8 metro section featured a 10-by-6-inch, four-color photo of publisher Bill Allen, together with his two guests, Mayor Tim Fink and Governor Walter Hickel, as they prepared to embark on the inaugural ride of the *Times*'s new hot air balloon. The red, yellow, green, and blue vehicle sported the *Times*'s large black logo; the bonding publisher, mayor, and governor sported bright-red *Times*-logoed jackets. The accompanying article was frothy with smiles and quips and champagne. The caption topping the picture read FLIGHT OF FANCY FOR THE HIGH AND MIGHTY. Some readers thought they saw journalistic standards sink out of sight.

◆ **LAUREL** to *The Kansas City Star* and staff writer Joe Stephens, for detecting the smoke and finding the fire. When in the February 26 primary an obscure candidate for city council — Joe Spinello, a man with no history of public service, a man who had not registered to vote for more than a decade, but a man who happened to belong to the family that owned the Shady Lady Lounge, a local strip bar with reputed ties to the mob — suddenly bested all but one of his six competitors, Stephens's investigative alarm went off. Cross-checking the computerized database he has developed on mob-related businesses and individuals against local, county, and state records, Stephens was able to show, nine days before the general election (and within the *Star*'s self-imposed time limit for such damaging pre-election disclosures) that two-thirds of Spinello's campaign financing came from such dubious sources as reputed mob associates, their families, and their businesses. Stephens also documented a number of occasions when Spinello had been in the company of some rather shady gentlemen — including a man the FBI calls one of the three top leaders in the Kansas City crime family. In the general election, Spinello was handily trounced.

◆ **MINIDART** to *The Miami Herald*, for a fitting footnote to the summer's sorry saga of purloined words — to wit:

After the July 2 page one revelation by *The Boston Globe* that H. Joachim Maitre, the dean of the college of communications at Boston University, had in his May 12 commencement speech "before a crowd of future journalists … repeated nearly word for word portions of an article by a nationally known film critic but never acknowledged the source"; and

after *The New York Times*, in a bylined piece by Boston bureau chief Fox Butterfield on the following day, had picked up the story, incorporating additional reporting and interviews and noting, in the sixth of eighteen paragraphs, that the plagiarism charges had been "first made … in an article in *The Boston Globe*"; and

after *The New York Times*, in a page 3 editors' note on July 11, had confessed that its July 3 article had contained "a passage of five paragraphs that closely resembled five paragraphs in the *Globe* article" involving comparisons "of the same sets of quotations from the disputed texts" and was therefore "improperly dependent on the *Globe*'s account"; and

after *The Washington Post* in a July 12 piece had fleshed out the story behind the *Times*'s editors' note by identifying the sources who had brought those close resemblances to the *Times*'s attention (an anonymous letter writer and the conservative Olin Foundation), by raising the question of whether "any action will be taken against Butterfield," and by reminding its readers of previous complaints against the *Times*man's work (in his Palm Beach rape story Butterfield had identified the woman by name); and

after *The Washington Post* on July 13 had published a page 2 "clarification" of its own, in which it explained that a July 7 story on mosquito and grasshopper infestation in Florida had "violated *Post* policies" by appearing "to be based on original interviewing and reporting, when in fact most of it was taken from material previously published by *The Miami Herald* and The Associated Press," as well as by failing "to credit the original sources of the material used"; and

after a related July 13 piece by *Post* media writer Howard Kurtz had clarified the clarification, detailing the plagiarized passages and reporting that the employee who wrote the story, Miami bureau chief Laura Parker, had "left the paper" (while noting that managing editor Leonard Downie, Jr., "would not say whether Parker had resigned or been fired, calling that an internal personnel matter"); but

before July 18, when, in the course of a plagiarism wrap-up inspired by yet another case (this one involving a Stanford University instructor who had lifted passages from a *Washington Monthly* piece for a book on corporate management), Kurtz revealed that the *Post* had indeed "fired" Parker "last week" and that the *Times* had "suspended" Butterfield — without, however, indicating which paper had acted first, thus leaving readers to wonder who was playing at brinkmanship in the attribution war (although it was clear that no executive at either the *Times* or the *Post* would be following the example of the president of Japan's Kyodo News Service, Shiju Sakai, who, according to the AP, upon discovering that fifty-one medical articles by a Kyodo senior writer were almost identical to a series published seventeen years before in a Japanese newspaper, took a 10 percent pay cut for a month, then resigned),

The Miami Herald on July 13 picked up from the Los Angeles Times-Washington Post News Service Kurtz's piece on the *Post*'s plagiarism of the mosquito story and its apology to the *Herald*. As sent out over the wires, the piece had included a paragraph in which John Pancake, the *Herald*'s state editor, was quoted as saying, among other things, that "I wish I could tell you [plagiarism] never happened at *The Miami Herald*, but I suspect it has." None of Pancake's words or thoughts or sentiments appeared in the *Herald*'s version in any way, shape, or form, with or without attribution. ◆

This column is compiled and written by Gloria Cooper, CJR*'s managing editor, to whom nominations should be addressed.*

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THE MEDIA AND THE RECESSION

How bad is it—and who's really getting hurt?

BY KAREN ROTHMYER

If any company and any top executive personify the high-flying nature of the media business during the 1980s, that company is Time Warner and that executive is Steven J. Ross. Time Warner, which came into existence in 1989 with the merger of Time Inc. and Warner Communications, is now the second-largest media company in the world after Bertelsmann of Germany, with interests stretching from magazines to cable television to records to book publishing.

Presiding over this gigantic enterprise as co-c.e.o. is a man whose regular salary and bonus last year amounted to an estimated $3.3 million, not counting a bonus of nearly $75 million he received in connection with the merger.

But as at so many companies in the media industry, which in the mid-1980s led all other industries in profitability, all is not well in TimeWarnerland. Many investors were unhappy this summer when the company announced plans to sell rights to buy more stock — and thus decrease the relative value of their holdings — in order to pay off the enormous debt incurred in connection with the merger. At the same time, concern about the editorial integrity of the company's magazines was being prompted by several examples of what appeared to be inappropriate business-side involvement.

Stiil, despite the problems, Time Warner is a long way from the poorhouse, having enjoyed a strong year in 1990, not counting the debt costs. And instances of high-quality journalism continue to abound — for example, a recent investigation in *Money* magazine detailing how financial con artists parade as radio talk-show hosts.

In many ways, the mixed and changing fortunes of Time Warner are symbolic of what has happened in general to media companies in recent times. For years they had been overlooked, even after a trend toward going public had put most of the biggest news companies into shareholders' hands. Then, suddenly, they became objects of desire to investors and potential owners, who saw in them what appeared to be limitless possibilities to increase revenues by raising advertising rates, to enjoy the benefits of consolidation and monopoly, and, not so incidentally, to provide entree to the country's social and political inner circles. As *Forbes* magazine noted in early 1987, "America's communications media increasingly took on the look of a giant investment souk," owing to the realization that they have "been able to generate rivers of cash decade after decade." The eighties were also a time when any remaining illusions about journalism as an enterprise different from other businesses were finally put to rest. "We're in this to make money," said Keith Gollust of Coniston Partners in 1985 in explaining his interest in taking over Storer Communications.

NET INCOME OF MEDIA COMPANIES, 1990

Company	1990 Sales (in millions of dollars)	1990 Net Income (in millions of dollars)	% Net Down from 1989
FORTUNE 500 AVERAGE			**-11.7**
Capital Cities/ABC	5,480	478	-1.6
Times Mirror	3,633	180	-39
CBS	3,516	111	-63
Gannett	3,446	377	-5
Knight-Ridder	2,305	149	-40
New York Times Co.	1,777	65	-76
Dow Jones	1,728	107	-66
Washington Post Co.	1,439	175	-12

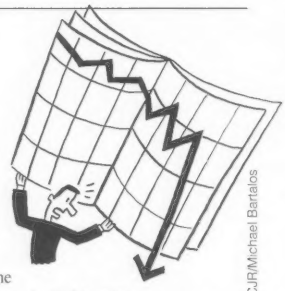
sources: *Fortune*, April 22 and June 3, 1991

Karen Rothmyer is a contributing editor of CJR. *Jon Grogins and Evan M. Silverman,* CJR *interns, provided research assistance.*

ADVERTISING REVENUE DECREASES

First quarter of 1991 compared with first quarter of 1990 for newspapers and broadcast; first five months for magazines

News organization	Decline
Time Warner (magazines)	-9.8
Hearst (magazines)	-3.0
Condé Nast	-4.5
Hachette	-7.4
Times Mirror	-12.0
Knight-Ridder	- 8.5
CBS (television network)	-13.0
NBC(television network)	-12.0



CJR/Michael Bartalos

sources: *Crain's New York Business*, June 17, 1991, for first four; *New York Times*, April 24, 1991, for Times-Mirror; *USA Today*, April 26, 1991, for Knight-Ridder; estimates by Robert Coen in *Broadcasting*, June 10, 1991, for CBS and NBC

By early this year it was clear that the media boom on Wall Street had come to an end. As the title of a May 13 *Forbes* story about prospects for media companies put it, "The Party's Over." After a decade in which no price seemed too high to pay for a broadcast property or to launch a new magazine, reality set in along with the recession. Reports on the previous twelve months told the tale. The average sale price of an AM/FM radio station, which had soared to more than $6 million in 1987, dropped to under $2 million. Profits for many of the major media companies crashed — in a few cases straight through the floor: Dow Jones, down 66 percent from the year before; the New York Times Company, down 75 percent; NBC broadcasting operating profits, down an estimated 21 percent; CBS broadcasting, an estimated loss of $50 million.

Nor did the first six months of 1991 offer much ground for believing that media companies' troubles were over. Indeed, in some cases, the slide accelerated. Gannett, the country's largest publisher of daily newspapers, reported that its earnings were down 20 percent, while the New York Times Company reported a decline of 76 percent and Media General recorded a drop of 50 percent. CBS said its second-quarter earnings were down 63 percent.

The main reason everywhere for the poor showing was continued severe weakness in advertising. *The Wall Street Journal*, for example, which experienced a 9.7 percent drop in ad linage in 1990, saw linage drop 21.2 percent in the first quarter and 9.4 percent in the second quarter of this year. Ad revenues for newspapers, magazines, and television networks were all down about 7 percent in the first few months of 1991. (Cable, however, increased.)

Warren Buffett, regarded as one of the smartest investors in the country and head of a company that is the largest shareholder in Capital Cities/ABC, commented recently that he thinks media companies will be "considerably less marvelous" than he thought only a few years ago. Tom Ferguson, president of the Washington Post Company, was quoted in a *Wall Street Journal* story on ad revenues as saying, "There's no light at the end of the tunnel." And even with indicators showing that the economy as a whole was slowly improving, David Pecker, c.e.o. of Hachette Magazines, told *Crain's New York Business* in June that "everybody has written off this year."

The declines prompted a continuing onslaught of layoffs, cutbacks of the newshole, and budget slashing. Coming on top of the economies that had been imposed to insure continued high profits during the 1980s, the new cuts left news staffs shaken and many employees bitter. In January, the parent company of *The Atlanta Journal* and *Constitution* announced it was cutting its workforce by 133 people. Gralla Publications has dropped close to 100 magazine staffers, or more than 20 percent of the total, over the past few months. CBS recently announced layoffs of 400 people, more than a quarter of them news employees, on top of several earlier rounds of cuts. "It's not just the layoffs — it's the demoralization, people asking, 'Who's going to be next? Now what?'" Joan Snyder, one of the recent CBS casualties, told the *Los Angeles Times* in May. "Being at CBS News today is like watching the lights go out on a skyscraper, one by one."

But wait a minute. Is this really the end of Western civilization? Is there really no light at the end of the tunnel?

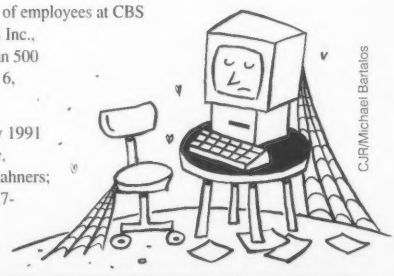
To search for answers, the place to begin is not the company cafeteria or even the executive dining room, but Wall Street. While laid-off journalists have every right to feel aggrieved, and while media executives may be running around like headless chickens, one need look no farther than the investment community for some perspective on the current scene. True, major investor Warren Buffett has tempered his enthusiasm about the prospects for the media

A SAMPLING OF MEDIA LAYOFFS, 1990-91

Company	Number Laid Off	% of Workforce
Atlanta Journal and *Constitution*	133	2.5
Daily News, Los Angeles	50	4.2
The Patriot Ledger and Memorial Press Group	40	6.7
San Antonio Light	45	6
Cahners Publishing (*Variety*, etc.)	200 (est.)	5 to 9
Gralla Publications (magazines)	96	21
CBS Inc.*	400	6

*Since 1986, the number of employees at CBS News, a division of CBS Inc., has dropped by more than 500 (*Washington Post*, April 6, 1991), or 35 percent.

Source: *Presstime*, May 1991 for newspapers; *Ad Age*, January 21, 1991, for Cahners; *Magazine Week*, May 27-31, 1991, for Gralla; *Broadcasting*, April 8, 1991, for CBS.



CJR/Michael Bartalos

industry. But he also predicted that many media businesses will remain "economic marvels in comparison with American industry generally." A similar note was struck last fall by media analyst John Morton, who remarked that while it's true that newspapers aren't making as much money as they have been, "all that is really happening is that instead of being two or three times more profitable than most businesses, newspapers this year are reduced to being only one or two times more profitable."

The numbers bear out the sanguine evaluations of the experts. And where better to begin than at the top? Of all the numbers that looked healthy last year, surely none looked healthier than top media c.e.o.s' compensation. Steve Ross of Time Warner was clearly in a class by himself. But no one among top media executives was likely to be volunteering for the lobster shift in order to qualify for extra pay. Among news media companies listed in a recent *Business Week* survey, ten of fourteen top executives had cash compensation of over $1 million dollars, pretty much on a par with the $1.2 million average of all American top management. And that, of course, does not include the value of stock options and the like, which in some cases were far more than actual salary. Comparing the total of all forms of compensation at the top with salaries of typical reporters, the gap at Capital Cities/ABC was about 85 to 1, the same as the national average, and at Gannett, a little over 60 to 1. (This compares with an estimated 17 to 1 ratio in Japan.)

Nor did many companies stint when it came to giving the bosses raises, despite the drastic cuts among lower-level staff. While Dow Jones profits were plummeting by 66 percent and the company was laying off at least forty-five news employees, chairman Warren Phillips got a cash increase of 4 percent, to $1.16 million, plus $122,000 in long-term compensation. At CBS, c.e.o. Laurence Tisch got an increase of 2 percent, to $1.35 million, despite the company's nearly 63 percent plunge in profits.

Joan Snyder, the laid-off veteran CBS producer, may have expressed the feelings of many of those she left behind when she told the *Los Angeles Times*, "When I think of the new owners and the money they have made on the networks, I think, hell, if you're such a philanthropist, why not plow the money back into CBS News?"

While executive pay looked particularly healthy, it was hardly the only number that did so. As analyst Morton noted, media company profits, while dismally down from their own best years, still look far from disastrous relative

THE UNPLEASANT ROLE OF TERMINATOR

JAY SMITH, publisher of The Atlanta Journal *and* Constitution, *began his career in journalism as a reporter for the Dayton, Ohio,* Daily News *in 1971. He spent twelve years at the* Daily News, *the last two as president, before moving on to the* Austin American-Statesman *and then, in 1986, to Atlanta. All three papers are owned by Cox Enterprises, Inc., a privately held company that reported revenues of more than $2 billion last year, up 6 percent from 1989, according to the company's annual report. That report described the* Journal *and* Constitution *as "the fastest-growing major newspapers in the nation" in 1990. In January, the papers laid off 133 people, out of a total workforce of about 4,500. Smith, forty-one, is married and has three children.*

A layoff feels awful. It's the absolute last step you take. You work hard to cut expenses, to find new sources of revenue. The last thing you want to do is tell someone that they no longer have a job.

We did literally hundreds — if not thousands — of things to cut costs and become more efficient. We left empty positions empty. We cut back on travel. We eliminated an annual company-wide picnic. We went through all of our buildings and managed to turn out about one-third of our lights as a way of conserving energy. We looked at all of the legal pads we were buying and asked, Can we make our own, using waste newsprint? And we did that. We tried everything.

Unfortunately, as we hit the start of this year, it became apparent to us that we didn't have too many more ways we could either build revenue or reduce expenses. The mood in the newsroom and around the rest of the building at the time was one of real hurt. People here have really worked hard and have poured their hearts and soul into the newspaper, and to see colleagues laid off, that hurt. But I think we came quickly to the recognition that the paper has got to be financially strong if it's going to be a strong newspaper and a newspaper that's worth anything to this community.

CJR/Greg Foster



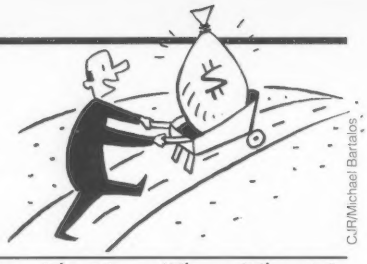
The layoffs were spread proportionately across the operation, including news, advertising, circulation, production. The department heads made recommendations about who would go and who would stay — mostly on the basis of seniority. We agonized about this collectively. Something of this magnitude, you don't simply say, "Do it," and then walk away from it. Once the decisions were made, the people who were laid off were told by their immediate supervisors, all on one day. You try to get the bad news over with.

Twenty years ago we were fairly immune to this type of business pressure. We were a good bit more sheltered from the realities of life than perhaps we should have been. I think it's important to keep in mind that newspapers as a business are reflective of society. I don't know of anybody else that's leading a soft existence right now. I think we're experiencing something that virtually every other business is experiencing. It's a part of life, and you deal with it.

Interviewed by Cassandra Tate, a frequent contributor to CJR.

EXECUTIVE PAY

sources: *Business Week*, May 6, 1991, for pay; *Fortune*, April 22 and June 3, for profits



CJR/Michael Bartalos

Company	Executive	Salary & Bonus 1990	% Change from '89	% Change in Co. profits from '89
CapCities/ABC	D.Burke	$1,030,000	-1	-1.6
CBS	L. Tisch	1,350,000	+2	-63
Dow Jones	W. Phillips	1,158,000	+4	-66
Gannett	J. Curley	1,300,000	+1	-5
Knight- Ridder	J. Batten	846,000	+25	-40
NYTimes	A.Sulzberger	463,000	-22	-76
Times Mirror	R. Erburu	882,000	-23	-39
Washington Post	K. Graham	555,000	-25	-12

to other industries. In 1990, when the whole economy dropped into recession, the average profits of all Fortune 500 industrial companies were down 11.7 percent. This was virtually the same as the 12 percent drop recorded for the publishing and printing industry. And some media companies beat the average handily: Gannett's much-discussed first-ever earnings decline as a public company amounted in reality to only 5 percent.

More significant in terms of relative health is the issue of how many cents of every dollar of sales showed up as profit on the bottom line. In 1990 the median profits of all Fortune 500 industrial companies as a percent of sales was 4.1 percent — in other words, out of every $1 earned, 4.1 cents were profit. Some media companies did far better: for example, *Fortune* calculated the Washington Post's profits as a percent of sales at 12 percent; McGraw-Hill's at 9 percent. Even in the wretched first quarter of 1991, when ad revenues were plummeting and the costs of covering the gulf war were skyrocketing, *Business Week* estimated the Tribune Company's profits as a percent of sales at 4.5, and Capital Cities/ABC's at 4.7. The Washington Post and Dow

THE PAIN OF BEING TERMINATED

JOHN LONG, fifty-three, an editor at the NBC News bureau in Miami, was among ten people who were laid off when the bureau was closed, effective September 27. A graduate of Youngstown University in Ohio, he joined NBC in 1965 as an assistant editor, and had worked since then for either the network or its affiliates. He and his wife have two daughters in college and a twelve-year-old son.

The news hit me like a ton of bricks. I've been here a long time, doing a job I love. Now I have to put together a résumé. When I got hired at NBC, I never even filled out an application.

I'm a victim of my location. If I was in Washington, with my seniority I wouldn't have to worry about it — for now. But eventually it's going to hit everybody. In network news you'll have an anchor and that's about it. They're going to gather their reports from affiliates and other sources. I think NBC as we know it structurally will be gone. But even if you want to change your approach to newsgathering, how can you get rid of experience? I don't understand it.

This is all I've done for over twenty-five years. Now I'm faced with trying to get another job, at fifty-three. I don't care where you go, when a fifty-three-year-old man applies for a job, they're going to be hesitant about hiring you. Although I'm physically sound, they're still going to say, how many years can this guy give us?

This whole thing is devastating. It's blown my income. I'm not worried about college money now — I'm worried about making a house payment. We've made very good money here, although we've worked very hard for it, and at any local station now I would be going in for about one-fourth of what I've earned here.



CJR/Tom Salyer

John Long will survive somehow. Until I die, somehow I'll do something. I think the real loser is the news viewer. The people who own NBC don't really care about their obligation to the American people, to the viewers, to their own affiliates. It's more than just me. I'm saying all of you are going to be hurt. We brought you that man on the moon. I was at Mount St. Helens when it blew. I was with Sadat when he got killed. We were in the earthquakes in Salvador and Mexico City. We are those people who for all these years have been part of what you at home turn your TV on to see. We've gone way out of our way to bring you the true story. An honest story. I think this is what could be lost.

Interviewed by Cassandra Tate.

Jones, for all the hand-wringing, did no worse than American industry as a whole — 4.3 percent.

Newspapers generally talk about pre-tax profits rather than the bottom line. One recent estimate is that pre-tax margins for newspapers will be close to 17 percent this year. That is down from the 24 percent of five years ago, but as analyst Morton has noted, "There are lots of industries that do not see 15 percent margins in the midst of their biggest booms in history."

A similar pattern holds true when one looks at return on equity, which is an investor's method of calculating how much a company earned with each dollar invested in it by its shareholders. The median for all Fortune 500 industrial companies was 13 percent last year. While many media companies didn't hit that average, others exceeded it: at the Washington Post it was 19 percent; at Gannett, 18 percent; at Knight-Ridder, 17 percent; at McGraw-Hill, 18 percent.

Probably the best indication that things were not as grim as they might at first seem is that the bottom did not drop out of media stocks. Over the twelve months ending in March, publishing and broadcasting stocks generally lost value while average prices for all stocks were up about 6 percent, as reported in *Forbes*. But declines like the 3 percent experienced by CBS or the 4 percent experienced by Knight-Ridder were hardly devastating, especially when compared with a bank stock like Chase Manhattan, which dropped 50 percent. Moreover, investors remained prepared to pay high prices for media stocks relative to the companies' earnings. At midyear, for example, a share of Times Mirror Company was selling at about $30, which was 25 times earnings, and Dow Jones was selling at about $28, or 28 times earnings, compared with the 16 times earnings of 500 representative stocks tracked by Standard & Poor's.



CJR/Michael Bartalos

TWO MEASURES OF CORPORATE HEALTH

sources: *Fortune*, April 22 and June 3, for sales as percent of profits and Fortune 500 medians. *Business Week*, May 6, 1991, for 1990 ROE figures

Company	1990 Profits as % of Sales	1990 Return on Equity
FORTUNE 500 MEDIAN	**4.1**	**13.0**
Times Mirror	5	9.4
Gannett	11	18.3
Knight-Ridder	6	16.7
McGraw-Hill	9	18.1
NYTimes	4	6.1
Dow Jones	6	7.4
Washington Post	12	19.3
CBS	3.2	3.3
CapCities/ABC	8.7	14.2

Having said all this, however, and having made the case that a lot of media companies are crying all the way to the bank, it's only fair to point out that businesses, like journalists, look for trends. The financial trends have been unmistakeably down of late, and it would be a foolish management that failed to note this and take measures to deal with it. Adding urgency to these short-term realities, the unexpected — and in some cases, large — drops in revenues brought on by the recession were really like a cold bucket of water. They caused top executives to look hard at longer-term issues like newspaper readership and changing demographics, and much of what they saw was alarming. "There are problems that just won't go away when the economy improves," Cathleen Black, the new head of the

RIPPLES IN RIO

The ripple effect of the recession-driven editorial "downsizing" among U.S. media is hitting Brazil's foreign-correspondent community like a tidal wave. Staff positions are changing into part-time stringer slots, and many long-time stringers say their editors are asking them to write less, and less often.

Some are packing up and buying one-way tickets home. If they have to face a tight job market, they figure, it might as well be in familiar environs.

Among the casualities: *Time* magazine eliminated its Rio de Janeiro bureau, converting a staff position into a "superstringer" slot; *Business Week* closed its São Paulo office and cut a salaried position in favor of free-lance coverage; United Press International, in its continuing saga of retrenchment, also abandoned São Paulo.

Veteran correspondents note that television crews, which once descended on South America with some regularity, are seldom seen these days. Paul Knox, Rio de Janeiro correspondent for the *Toronto Globe and Mail*, one of the few outlets retaining a stable presence, noted the absence of foreign television at the trial last December of the murderers of Amazon labor leader Chico Mendes.

Industry publications (like *Advertising Age* and *Chemical Week*), the bread and butter for many jack-of-all-trades stringers, are nearly unanimous in their quest for fewer words.

Coupled with disappearing jobs and assignments, the fate of the U.S. dollar has provided another "push factor" for departing expatriate journalists. The greenback's 359 percent rise since President Fernando Collor de Mello took office in March 1990 would seem a blessing — were it not for the period's 553.5 percent inflation rate.

Bill Hinchberger

Bill Hinchberger is the São Paulo correspondent for Business International.

American Newspaper Publishers Association, said at a meeting in late spring.

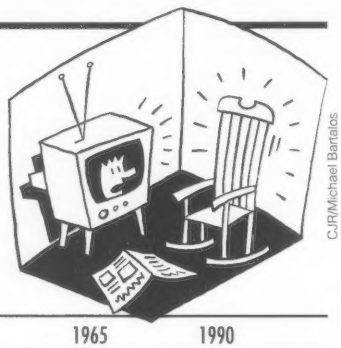
For example, in 1965 a Gallup poll found that 67 percent of adults under thirty-five said they had read a paper the day before; in 1990 a similar survey by Times Mirror found that number to be 29 percent. In 1965 some 52 percent said they had watched TV news the day before; in 1990 the figure was 41 percent. In the long term, such trends can only lead to an eventual drop in newspaper circulation (which has been sustained to date by population growth), and to a steady erosion of network audience.

To be sure, not all of what has been happening suggests a public withdrawal from news. During the gulf war, for example, the public demonstrated that when the news was compelling, the audience was there.

Another long-term trend of note, on the business side, is the shift of retail advertising away from traditional media and into coupons, promotions, and direct mail. This shift hurts all media, but newspapers are also affected in a second way: because classified advertising, which is highly sensitive to the economy, now accounts for a much larger piece of the overall ad revenue pie, newspapers' incomes are likely to be marked by far more volatility than in the past.

CHANGING READERSHIP AND VIEWERSHIP

source: *The Quill*, April 1991, taken from data in a Gallup poll and a poll by the Times Mirror Center for People and the Press



CJR/Michael Bartalos

% of Adults under 35	1965	1990
who said they had read a paper the previous day	67%	29%
who said they had watched TV news the previous day	52%	41%

In sum, to the extent that media companies are experiencing short-term and dramatic financial downturns, the end of the recession will take care of them. To the extent that altered patterns of culture and commerce mean a shifting from one medium to another, and an increasingly corporate cast to news companies, the future offers prospects of wrenching change.

For journalists, the challenge will be to learn to live with the financial realities while, at the same time, fighting against the corporate values that so often accompany them. That will require two forms of activity not now common in American newsrooms: serious financial analysis, by news employees, of their organizations; and collective action — not individual gestures or expressions of concern — aimed at giving journalists a voice as one of the stakeholders in media corporations. ◆

A LOST GENERATION

BY RICHARD E. KIPLING

The economic malaise visiting the country has rocked the newspaper industry to a degree that few in the business imagined possible just a few years ago. Newsroom executives are scrambling, cutting budgets, expenses, and newsroom positions. There is widespread talk among experts of "structural" change, that job freezes and "downsizes" are more than responses to the current recession; they are basic, systemic changes in the economics of the newspaper industry. The lost jobs, they say, may never come back.

Perhaps no group has felt the weight of bottom-line newspapering more severely than entry-level journalists. The journalism schools continue to pump out graduates, but chances are that if the parchment says class of '91 or even class of '90, the graduate will be unable to break into the profession this year. I have taken to calling them the lost journalistic generation. As a hiring editor at a large paper, I've watched the parade of young applicants over the past year and listened to their tales and pleas for advice. No, I answer, I don't know where there are any entry-level jobs.

Conversations with scores of students, J-school administrators, and newspaper recruiters reveal a number of disturbing new trends in entry-level journalism. Among them:

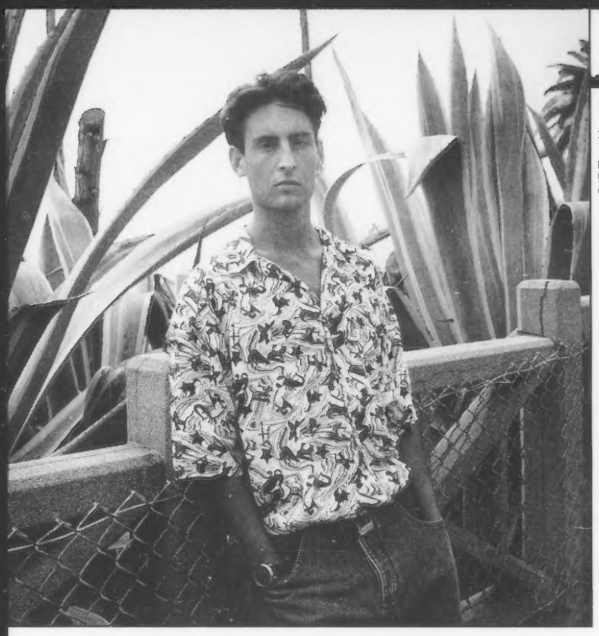
● The scarcity of full-time jobs has forced graduating seniors into their third or fourth summer internship. As a result, these training slots have been snatched away from undergraduates, who will be knocking on recruiters' doors in a year or two without the requisite experience.

Observes Chris Jones, a May Missouri grad who is currently a summer intern for *The Kansas City Star*: "The economy is forcing seniors to get internships — positions they're overqualified for. And it's really pushing back sophomores and juniors a full year. I certainly wouldn't want to be a junior right now. I know sophomores and juniors who are going home this summer, to pump gas or work for their dad."

● Increasing numbers of skilled graduates — many from the country's best journalism schools — trying desperately to remain attached to the profession have become gypsy journalists, moving from one low-paying, morale-sapping temporary job to another. In most cases, they are charged with producing a kind of micro-journalism, with little room for creativity or skills development. Some have been stuck in such jobs for several years.

Says Richard Wright, director of the journalism department at Wayne State University in Detroit: "The biggest feature of the current recession is that nothing's permanent anymore. No one's hiring anyone for real. They want to hire you as an intern for six months and then they'll see."

Richard E. Kipling is a hiring editor at the Los Angeles Times.



CJR/Tom Vinetz

"A certain part of me says the recession is going to end and people are going to need young writers again"

Chuck Bock, 1991 college graduate

● An increasing number of talented young journalists are considering giving up the profession, saying it offers too little opportunity.

Says Don Fry, head of the writing group for the Poynter Institute for Media Studies: "It's not just the graduating classes; it's those who came into the business the past two to three years and can't move up. They're looking for ways to get out of the profession. I've talked a lot of people out of going to law school." Arlene Morgan, who as senior editor/development heads newsroom recruiting for *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, adds, "I know I'm going to lose talent I've helped to develop, talent I've worked with, mentored. To what end am I doing all this?"

● Papers of all sizes are now demanding two years' experience or more for entry-level positions, further restricting the opportunities for recent graduates.

"I knew it was going to be competitive going in," says Todd Natenberg, a Missouri graduate who is now an intern at *The Arizona Republic* on a ten-week Pulliam fellowship. "The problem is, you're competing against people with two, three years' experience for the starting jobs at the papers, not just the J-school grads."

If these trends persist, people like Natenberg and Chris Jones are likely to lead very different lives as journalists than those who entered the profession just a few years ago.

Such thoughts have crossed Chuck Bock's mind. Bock is a May graduate of Whittier College, a liberal arts school about fifteen miles east of downtown Los Angeles. He thought he had it all going for him. "I was the student speaker for the commencement ceremony. I had a sports reporting internship for the *L.A. Times*; I interned in sports at the *Lexington Herald-Leader* and before that at a small southern California daily. I really believed that with all the clips and experience I wouldn't have a problem finding a job."

Bock started getting nervous last spring, and even took out a classified ad in *Editor & Publisher*. Nothing. He sent packets to ninety papers and got ten letters back — thanks, but no thanks. He took to calling editors, but found it too depressing. "They don't want to be on the phone with you at all and they convey that."

He tries to remain optimistic. "A certain part of me says at some point the recession is going to end and people are going to need young writers again." Still, he is haunted by the possibility of failure. "I have this fear of after twenty years I end up at *The Idaho Spud*, that I'm at a place that's not going to lead to anywhere else. But now, if *The Idaho Spud* opens up, you say to yourself, I'm not gonna be able to turn down an awful lot."

I could cite a dozen Chuck Bock-like examples. Yet who doesn't remember the brisk pace of a couple years back, when journalism conventions were crowded, electric; when papers competed fiercely for talent; when hiring editors could play mentor, directing novitiates not yet ready for metro dailies to readily available jobs in smaller, more forgiving newsrooms? But that was the go-go '80s.

We've come to this only four years after the Associated Press Managing Editors Association issued a special report that asked why "the best and brightest" were not going to journalism school. We now know the answer: they went, and now many are high-tailing it outside the profession to find a job.

There are some among us who are not so dismayed. David Hamilton, who as assistant managing editor at *Newsday* heads that paper's recruiting efforts, says newsroom hiring is simply resuming its normal rhythm. "There was this newspaper boom time of the eighties, this bubble that was high and warm and which seemed to describe life as it always was. Well, the bubble has burst and we're falling back to the ground." Hamilton adds, "When you get down to the desire to do the craft, the winnowing is not an undesirable side effect."

But for me, what we are witnessing is not winnowing. It is the wholesale squandering of a generation of talent that could come back to haunt already troubled newsrooms.

When this is all over, when newsrooms again start to hire young journalists, those newsrooms will have lost two or three years of fresh perspectives on newsgathering that a roomful of older journalists can't offer. They will have foregone two or three years of bursting-with-energy raw talent, talent that can bring refreshing changes to newsrooms deadened by routine. And they will have sacrificed two or three years of the maturing process that papers invest in their young journalists to ensure that wisdom is added to those youthful perspectives.

It is a tough time for aspiring journalists and for the industry they aspire to join. It is also a time for newspapers to consider young journalists as part of their capital investment budget. Call it R & D, whatever. The future of these young people is the industry's as well. ◆

a Baghdad Baedeker

BY MICHAEL MASSING

If you've ever thought of visiting Iraq, now's the time to go. The Baghdad government, eager to generate support for the lifting of U.N. sanctions, has opened the country to foreign journalists as never before. There are many excellent stories to be had in Iraq, but just as many obstacles to obtaining them. Here, then, is a brief guide to the land of Saddam Hussein:

VISAS

Direct applications to Iraq's U.N. mission in New York. Apply well in advance since the process can take weeks. Be sure to express interest in the effects of sanctions on the Iraqi people — this will expedite matters. If you're in a hurry, fly to Amman, Jordan, and lobby the press officer at the Iraqi embassy, where all press visas are actually issued. Make sure your passport contains no stamps from Israel, and, if you're Jewish, leave a blank where the visa application asks for your religion. Most visas are for two weeks but can be extended if you behave yourself.

GETTING THERE

Because of the embargo, there's no air service to Iraq. The only way in is the 550-mile overland route from Amman — most of it flat, brown, monotonous desert. Total driving time: about fifteen hours, depending on how long you're detained at the Iraqi border. (Between 5 A.M. and 8 A.M. customs officials are likely to be asleep.) Note the dramatic change in the road as you cross from Jordan — bumpy, two-lane blacktop — to Iraq — four-lane turning into six-lane superhighway.

HOTELS

Al-Rasheed (★★★★). Big, modern, and world-renowned. Good place for contacts. Many high-ranking visitors stay here and Iraqi VIPs often come to dine and dance. Check out the disco on the ground floor, where a table is reserved for Udai Hussein, Saddam's playboy son. Price: $140 a night.

Mansour Melia (★★★). Less bustling than the al-Rasheed but more convenient. Across the street from the Ministry of Information. Nicknamed "the prison" because Western hostages were brought here after the invasion of Kuwait. Price: $108 a night.

Both hotels are surrounded by high walls and monitored by security agents, making it difficult for ordinary Iraqis to enter. Unfortunately, they are the only two at which you are allowed to stay.

Warning: Do not use the minibar or sign for food at either the al-Rasheed or the Mansour Melia because you'll have to pay at the absurdly high official exchange rate. A Pepsi, for instance, will set you back $26.

MONEY

Take plenty of cash because, under the embargo, credit cards are not accepted in Iraq. The black market, once negligible in Iraq, now flourishes. Officially, one dollar is worth less than a third of a dinar, but on the street it will fetch more than six, making everything seem quite cheap, except for hotel rooms, which must be paid for in dollars.

GETTING AROUND

Baghdad, a city of almost four million, is very spread out. Though taxis are cheap and abundant, you'll want to hire a car and driver. A good driver can make all the difference in your stay. Not only can he point out sensitive landmarks, like prisons and interrogation centers, but he can also talk you through checkpoints and security guards. He can help to translate, too. Selecting a driver requires some care, though, as many report to the secret police. Try to get references from other journalists. Cost: About $25 a day (lunch often included).

Warning: Due to a lack of spare parts, caused by the sanctions, your car is likely to break down at some point.

CHECKING IN

As soon as you arrive, you must register with the government press office, on the ground floor of the Ministry of Information. You'll be required to pay a weekly fee of 1,200 dinars — about $200 at the unofficial rate — for the "services" rendered by the press office. These consist mostly of official "minders" assigned to escort you on your reporting rounds. In short, you must pay for your own censorship. This is less onerous than it sounds. First of all, in Baghdad itself you don't need a minder; reporters are now free to come and go in the capital as they please. Trips outside the city do require a minder, but you will find that many of them have no love for Saddam and are less than rigorous in controlling your movements.

TELEPHONES

Before the war, Iraq had one of the best phone systems in the third world, but the allied bombing took care of that, so you can forget about setting up appointments in advance. This can work to your advantage, though, in that you can simply show up at an office and ask for an interview on the spot. Most people will receive you, as this is now standard operating procedure in Baghdad.

SOURCES

Iraqis: Iraq is a police state and talking with foreigners can get people into trouble. Fortunately, dissatisfaction with the regime has grown so deep that many Iraqis are now willing to take the risk. The key is getting people alone and out of earshot of the ubiquitous informers. Try visiting hospitals, schools, and souks since doctors, teachers, and shopkeepers all tend to be chatty, and a surprising number speak English. Churches are also a good bet. Many of Iraq's nearly one million Christians have relatives in the West, and they are more likely to talk to visiting journalists. Mosques present a special problem, because the government — seeking to limit Westerners' contacts with Iraqis

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Michael Massing, a contributing editor of CJR, *recently visited Iraq on assignment for* The New York Review of Books.

— has declared them off-limits to non-Muslims. Female correspondents can try to get around the ban by cloaking themselves in the traditional black Islamic robe known as the *abayah*.

Diplomats: All Western embassies are closed except Norway's. However, the Vatican representative has been in Baghdad for more than three years and knows about much more than religion. The Soviets, too, are well plugged in and — exasperated with Saddam Hussein — very frank.

Sudanese community: Over the years, Iraq has imported many Sudanese workers. About 120,000 currently live in the country. Many work in hotels and restaurants and have seen a great deal. And, as foreigners, they often feel freer to talk than Iraqis.

Relief workers: The U.N., the International Committee of the Red Cross, Médecins sans Frontières, Catholic Relief Services, and many other Western groups are active in Iraq. Having regular contact with local residents, they are a good source of anecdotes.

PHOTOGRAPHS



Be very careful. There are sensitive installations all over Baghdad, and the innocuous-looking building you might want to snap could house a detention center. If you plan to take a lot of photos, ask to have a minder accompany you so that you know what's acceptable. Now and then you can try sneaking shots, but exercise caution. Government press officials sometimes invoke the name of Farzad Bazoft, the British journalist hanged as a spy.

MAPS

Unavailable inside Iraq — again, security concerns. Bring your own.

BOMBING TOUR

Get your driver to show you buildings damaged in the air war. The Baghdad convention center, the Baath party headquarters, and the Ministry of Defense are all a must. Be sure, though, not to miss less obvious sites, like bridges, power stations, and refineries, that serve mostly civilians. Check out the giant statue of Saddam located in Zawra Park, not far from the al-Rasheed; many Iraqis, you'll find, wonder why the Americans didn't level it.

NIGHT LIFE



Affluent Iraqis gravitate to the al-Rasheed, but far more interesting is Abu Nuwas Street, a hopping strip of night clubs, restaurants, and bars. Bordering the street is a park where many Baghdadis come to take an evening stroll. Good opportunity for meeting people. For dinner, sample one of the restaurants offering *masgouf*, a traditional Iraqi meal in which the customer selects a fish from a tiled pool, then watches as it's gutted, sliced up, and barbecued.

By the way, the crime rate in Baghdad is very low, so you don't need to worry about walking around at night.

OFFICIAL EVENTS

Don't expect very many. Foreign reporters are rarely informed of Saddam's whereabouts. However, you might get lucky and run into his convoy, which consists of about 150 vehicles, including communications vans, anti-aircraft guns, ambulances, fuel trucks, troop carriers, and more than sixty Mercedes-Benzes.

SIGHTS IN BAGHDAD

Saddam City (★★★). Sprawling slum on outskirts of capital. Home to 1.5 million people, mostly Shiite Muslims who migrated from the south. A hotbed of antigovernment sentiment. To sample it, try visiting local health clinics.

Kadhimiya Mosque (★★★). Baghdad's largest Shiite shrine. Striking gold-leafed dome and minarets, located next to Baghdad's main gold souk. Security at the mosque is tight, but chance encounters are a good possibility.

Mukhabarat Housing (★★). A district of expensive solar-powered townhouses reserved for high-ranking members of the *mukhabarat*, or secret police. Located on the Tigris River near the July 14 bridge — one of two destroyed by allied bombers — these apartments came through the war without a scratch, much to the chagrin of many Iraqis.

Abu Ghraib Prison (★★). The main penitentiary for political prisoners. Grim, heavily guarded fortress about 30 kilometers west of Baghdad. Risky.

Colonels' District (★). An affluent neighborhood that is home to many high-ranking members of the Iraqi army. Note the many Mercedeses, BMWs, and Volvos parked on the street.

Synagogue (★). Aging, boxlike building in downtown Baghdad. Chance to meet members of Iraq's Jewish community—population 150—before it dies out. Minder required (no reason given).

GETTING OUT OF BAGHDAD



Many interesting sites lie outside the capital, but you'll probably be pressed for time. Here are two day trips:

Karbala and Najaf: An easy drive from Baghdad, these two cities — held sacred by Shiite Muslims throughout the world — offer an opportunity to sample the mood among Iraq's Shiite population, which makes up 55 percent of the total. Both cities were the scene of fierce fighting during the March uprising against the Baathist government. The damage is still much in evidence, especially at the immense mosques that dominate the two cities. Ask to enter the courtyards of the mosques to see the damage up close.

On the road into Karbala, you will notice acre upon acre of date palm trees lying on the ground. They were chopped down by the military as a precaution against ambushes by Shiite rebels. Good photo if minder permits.

Kurdistan: Government press officers will try to discourage you from visiting Kurdistan, but if you insist, they will acquiesce. A special Kurdish guide and driver are necessary as official minders are subject to attack. Irbil, the capital of Kurdistan, is three and a half hours away by car. There you'll see Iraqi soldiers and Kurdish guerrillas, known as *Pesh Merga*, patrolling the streets together. A half hour north of Irbil you'll pass through the last government checkpoint; less than a kilometer away, you'll hit another checkpoint — this one controlled by the *Pesh Merga*. Excellent photo op as guerrillas will pose in front of a burned-out army tank.

DEPARTURE

You will probably leave by hiring a taxi. As you prepare to depart, the government press office may ask you to take along a visiting Arab correspondent. These journalists are in Iraq as "guests" of the Iraqi government, which pays all their expenses in return for favorable press coverage. If you don't want to help subsidize such coverage, just say no. ◆

WHO WILL UNWRAP THE OCTOBER SURPRISE?

BY JULIE COHEN

On April 15, former Carter administration staffer Gary Sick gave added weight to the "October Surprise" theory — the allegations that officials in the 1980 Reagan-Bush campaign cut a deal with Iranian revolutionaries to delay the release of the fifty-two hostages until after Reagan's inauguration — with a 2,000-word op-ed piece in *The New York Times*. For two and a half weeks, President Bush didn't respond to the charges and the White House press corps didn't ask him about them. The first official administration response came in the form of a Marlin Fitzwater one-liner: he called Sick "the Kitty Kelley of foreign policy."

Fitzwater's analogy was off the mark, and not just because the lanky, studious Mr. Sick — a Columbia University professor, former National Security Council member, and author of the definitive book on the hostage crisis — bears little resemblance to the diminutive, glitzy Kelley — a Washington socialite and author of "definitive" books on Jackie Onassis, Frank Sinatra, and now Nancy Reagan. Had Sick really been the Kitty Kelley of anything, we might have expected roughly equal media attention to Sick's allegations about the Reagan campaign and Kelley's allegations about the former first lady. That's hardly what we got.

When Kelley's book was released on April 8, all three network evening newscasts ran a reporter story. The local news shows and the tabloids went wild. Both *Time* and *Newsweek* ran Kitty Kelley cover stories. And *The New York Times* scooped everyone with a Sunday front-page article outlining Kelley's assertions about Nancy Reagan's fabricated childhood, her private lunches with Frank Sinatra, and her penchant for showering her friends and family with second- or third-hand trinkets. There were follow-up stories and analysis-of-the-Kitty-Kelley-hype stories. Within days every marginally conscious American knew about Kelley and the essence of her charges. But even now — with Congress set to begin a formal investigation into the October Surprise — few know the name Gary Sick and even fewer understand the essence of his suspicions about the Republican campaign in 1980.

The day Sick's piece appeared in the *Times*, listing dates and participants in suspected meetings between campaign staffers and Iranian clerics, none of the network evening newscasts even mentioned the story (although ABC's *Nightline* explored the issue that night and has since aired two investigative reports, produced with the *Financial Times* of London). *The New York Times* ran a page 10 story the day of Sick's op-ed piece and then didn't return to the issue until two weeks later, with another page 10 piece. The first report in *The Washington Post*, a five-paragraph Reuters story, ran eleven days after Sick's op-ed piece. Over the next three months, *Time* and *Newsweek* dealt with the October Surprise one time each: *Newsweek* in a page 28 story in the April 29 issue, *Time* on pages 24 and 25 of the July 1 issue.

In the time between mid-April, when Sick's piece and a PBS *Frontline* documentary explored the October Surprise, and early August, when Speaker of the House Thomas Foley announced his decision to move ahead with a full-scale inquiry, there were a number of newsworthy developments. Jimmy Carter accused Donald Gregg, now the U.S. ambassador to South Korea, of leaking classified information from the Carter administration to the Reagan campaign, and Carter staffers raised the alarming allegation that Reagan's campaign may have tipped off the Iranians about a planned second attempt to rescue the hostages; the State Department considered blocking a visa for former Iranian President Abolhassan Bani-Sadr, who came to the U.S. to promote his book *My Turn To Speak*, in which he asserts that the Reagan campaign cut a deal with the Iranians at the height of the hostage crisis; President Bush made his first public denials of the allegations; and eight of the former hostages voiced suspicions about the circumstances surrounding their release.

But many of these developments, which were reported by the wire services and picked up by alternative papers and even by the Phil Donahue show, were missed altogether by the major media. And a story that could make Deep Throat look shallow has yet to make the cover of *Time* or *Newsweek*.

When the story does appear, the key questions not only go unanswered, they go unasked. Questions like why did the Iranians suddenly break off negotiations with Carter in the fall of 1980, just when they appeared closer than ever to releasing the hostages? And when they eventually did strike a deal with the Carter administration (which promised the release of Iranian assets frozen in U.S. banks in exchange for the return of the hostages), why did the Iranians drop their demand for military spare parts, which had appeared so important to them a few months earlier? And why were planes loaded with American military equipment flying from Israel to Iran just after Reagan's inauguration in early 1981 — a time when no American hostages were being held in Iran or Lebanon? Is it possible that the Reagan administration was arming Iran in return

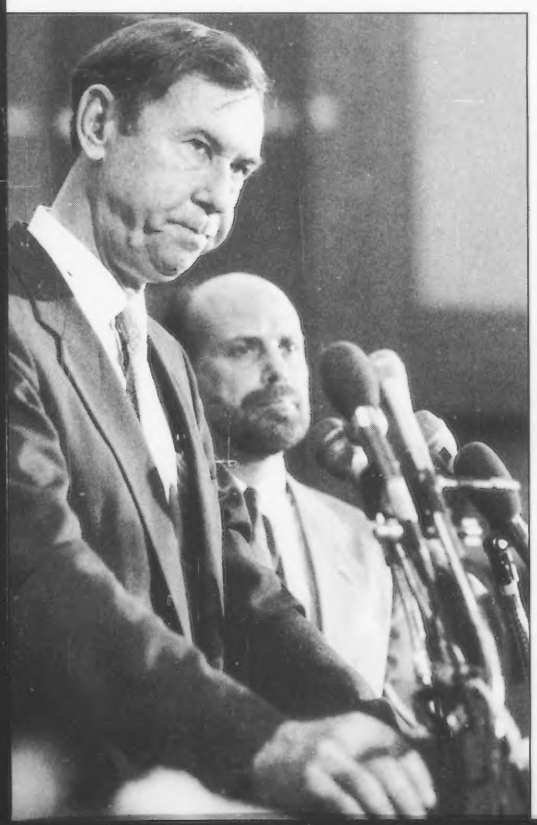
Julie Cohen is a news editor at WBAI, the Pacifica radio station in New York City.

for a perfectly timed release of the hostages — only minutes after Reagan's inauguration?

These pieces of circumstantial evidence — the strange shifts in Iran's bargaining positions and, later, the spare-part shipments to Iran — don't prove Gary Sick's allegations, but they are certainly at the heart of his case. And yet they are rarely mentioned in the major media. The reader or viewer is left to assume that the bulk of the support for a theory that most of us would rather not believe anyway comes from unconfirmable allegations made by untrustworthy sources. *The Washington Post*'s only front-page story on the October Surprise acknowledged that the "tale" is being promoted by some credible people, but the reader was left with the impression that most of the information comes from what reporter Thomas Lippman called "assorted felons, malcontents, arms dealers, self-proclaimed intelligence agents, and denizens of an international twilight zone." Case dismissed.

But what of the meeting in Washington that three Reagan campaign officials have said they had with a man claiming to be a representative of the Iranian government? According to a 1988 report in *The Miami Herald*, the officials said the Iranian offered to release the hostages not to Carter but to the 1980 Reagan-Bush campaign in exchange for favors from a future President Reagan. Although they said they had forgotten the Iranian's name and had lost the minutes of the meeting, the officials all insisted they had summarily rejected the offer. But if the campaign was putting the safety of the hostages above electoral politics, why didn't they inform the Carter administration about the offer, as officials from John Anderson's presidential campaign did when the Iranians approached them?

And what about Reagan's unusual reaction to the "53rd hostage," a reporter named Cynthia Dwyer who was captured later than the others (and not released until a month after Reagan's inauguration)? Reagan's national security adviser, Richard Allen, told this story on *The MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour* in 1986: the day after Reagan's first inauguration, when Allen told Reagan about this other hostage, the president responded, "Get the word out that the deal is off." But the only official deal to get the hostages out of Iran had been completed by the Carter administration and the Iranians *before* Reagan's inauguration. And the U.S. government had already fulfilled its part of that bargain — Iranian assets frozen in U.S. banks had already been released — so what deal was Reagan referring to?



When the story does appear, key questions not only go unanswered, they go unasked

Gary Sick, former National Security Council member in the Carter administration, and former hostage Barry Rosen at a news conference in June

These are the kinds of questions that have been raised by *The Nation*, *The Village Voice*, and *In These Times*, which have been reporting on this story since 1987, when the allegations were made in a book by Barbara Honegger, a former low-level Reagan staffer. While editors and reporters in the left-wing press were unconvinced that Honegger was a credible source, they decided that the substance of her charges was too great to be ignored. "This may be the most important story of this half of the century," wrote Joel Bleifuss, who has done much of the reporting and writing for the three cover stories and many columns on the subject published in *In These Times*. *The Village Voice* has also done several October Surprise cover stories, including an interview with Jimmy Carter in which the former president outlined the rapidly changing signals from Iran in the days just before the 1980 election. "The Iranian parliament was meeting and we had every information from Bani-Sadr and others that they were going to vote overwhelmingly to let the hostages go," the *Voice* quotes Carter as saying. "And at the last minute on Sunday [two days before the election] for some reason they had adjourned without voting.... The votes were there but the ayatollah or somebody commanded them to adjourn."

Another *Voice* cover story profiled arms dealer Richard Brenneke, who was put on trial by the federal government in 1990 on charges that he committed perjury when he told the October Surprise story under oath. Brenneke was acquitted. The *Voice* article concedes that Brenneke, who claims to have been a CIA operative, is not the most credible source in the world. As reporter Curtis Lang wrote: "It can be difficult for major news media to pick up a story relying on covert privateers who seem to feel they have a license to operate above the law but can't produce their paperwork." Yet if any news organizations

are equipped to track down documents and check up on stories from dubious sources it is the major publications and networks. And of those, only ABC's *Nightline* — a program which owes its start to the Iranian hostage crisis — has presented any major independent reporting on the October Surprise.

For example, *Nightline* reporters looked up the registration records of a hotel in Madrid where an Iranian arms dealer claims to have met with Reagan campaign staffers in July 1980. *Nightline* found that the arms dealer and his brother had checked in, as had a man named Robert Gray — that's the name of the man who was soon to become the top assistant to Reagan campaign manager William Casey. While Casey's secretary claims that Casey did not leave the country in July, *Nightline* dug out a July 30 *New York Times* article in which a campaign spokesperson said Casey would be available to the press "when he returns today from a trip abroad."

Nightline producers say they are putting more resources into the October Surprise story. Editors and producers I spoke with at *The New York Times*, *Time* magazine, CBS News, and NBC News say they too are devoting plenty of resources to the story. All agreed that the story is gaining momentum and that it will get bigger when Congress begins its formal investigation this fall.

Several of the newspeople I talked to pointed out that reporting on the October Surprise is especially tough because the alleged incidents happened more than a decade ago; because William Casey, who is at the center of many of the allegations, has been dead for four years; and because the major sources are shady characters, each with his own complex set of vested interests. "You have information coming from all directions," said Joelle Attinger, deputy chief of correspondents at *Time*. "There's a lot of reporting that needs to be done to nail this down."

But even without major investigative work, the media could be doing a better job on this story. A prime example is the coverage of both Bush's and Reagan's denials. When Bush first discussed the subject at a May 3 news conference, he addressed only the specific charge that he had gone to Paris himself in 1980 to meet with Iranians about delaying the hostages' release, an allegation that even most of those doing the alleging about misconduct in the campaign don't believe. Reports on the evening news and in the next day's papers described "an angry President Bush" calling on the press to "stop repeating rumors over and over again" — rumors he hadn't yet publicly denied. And throughout the life of this story, the only question reporters have consistently asked about President Bush has been, Was he in Paris on October



UPI/Bettmann

PAR FOR THE COURSE:
In a bizarrely worded denial, Reagan seemed to say that the Reagan-Bush campaign did *have some previously unreported dealings with the Iranians.*

20, 1988? rather than the classic political scandal question, What did he know and when did he know it? (In a May 9 letter to a former hostage, Bush finally issued a full denial of the entire story.)

In mid-June, reporters caught up with Ronald Reagan on a California golf course and asked him about the allegations. In a bizarrely worded denial, Reagan seemed to say that his campaign *did* have some previously unreported dealings with the Iranians. "This whole thing that I was worried about [the hostages' release] as a campaign thing is absolute fiction. I did some things to try the other way ... from the very beginning that they were ever held there, every effort on my part was made to get them home." Then he clearly denied having any personal contact with the Iranians; however, when asked if his campaign made such contact, he said he couldn't "get into details." The *Financial Times* ran the story under the headline REAGAN RENEWS IRAN HOSTAGE CONTROVERSY. *The Washington Post* took a different angle. Its headline was REAGAN CALLS HOSTAGE PLOT FICTION — EFFORT TO DELAY RELEASE DENIED. The *Post* printed Reagan's quote that he couldn't talk about his campaign's activities because "some of those things are still classified," without explaining that documents about talks between a foreign government and a presidential campaign couldn't possibly be classified. *The New York Times* didn't run the story at all.

Nor did the *Times* send a reporter to cover what readers would probably find the most interesting angle of the story — the reaction of the former hostages themselves. At a June 13 news conference on Capitol Hill, two of the hostages made their plea for a formal investigation. Moorhead Kennedy, a deputy district leader for the Republican party in New York City, spoke on behalf of six other hostages who had signed a letter to Congress saying they deserved to know whether anyone "conspired to prolong a kidnapping."

Both the *Times* and *The Washington Post* ran short wire service stories. Although all three networks taped the news conference, none used any soundbite on their newscasts that night, and only CBS mentioned it at all — in a one-sentence reader. Editors at CBS and the *Times* told me they feel they gave the story appropriate treatment. *Times* Washington editor Philip Taubman said he anticipates many more news conferences, adding that "we're not going to staff every announcement by people that have an interest in this issue," be it the Bush administration, the Democratic party, or the hostages. That seems like a surprising lack of interest in a group of people who for 444 days were the biggest news story in America.

A decade later, most of the hostages are not eager to be on the nightly news again. When Moorhead Kennedy began contacting others who had been in captivity with him, many said that although they thought Congress should investigate, they couldn't sign the letter. They told him the hostage ordeal was so painful they felt they had to put it behind them. And they have a right to that decision. The news media do not. ◆

CAMCORDERS

WHEN AMATEURS GO AFTER THE NEWS

BY GREG LUFT

An estimated fourteen million Americans now own camcorders, and hundreds of them are venturing into journalism. The amateur video footage already appearing on TV news programs is being submitted by meteorologists, airplane pilots, homemakers, teenagers, and just about anyone else who can point a camera and push a button. Some of the pictures can already be replayed in the nation's collective mind: a car falling through a hole in the Oakland Bay Bridge after the San Francisco earthquake, airplanes crashing into each other at air shows, huge tornadoes bearing down on small towns from Colorado to Ohio, and, of course, a group of Los Angeles police officers beating Rodney King.

They are images that, if nothing else, add a democratic dimension to television journalism worldwide. Some of the amateurs who catch newsworthy events on tape do it more by accident than by design. George Holliday, who videotaped the beating of Rodney King, is an example. According to Holliday's lawyer, James Jordan, Holliday was in bed when he heard sirens and then a ruckus outside his home. He got up and videotaped the action from his balcony without quite realizing what was going on.

Others, like Roger Harris of Orange, California, are news-video junkies who have police scanners in their homes and race to potential news events, hoping their footage will gain them fame or profit. Harris is a disabled former medical worker who makes anywhere from $50 to $125 for footage of news events.

In Denver, station KCNC-TV, which has been promoting its amateur Eyewitness Network since 1985, recently purchased fifteen camcorders for small-town radio stations, in essence hiring stringers to cover events. "It provides us with more sets of eyes," says KCNC promotions director Mike Jackson.

Jeff Bartlett, a consultant for the Dallas-based news consulting firm of Audience Research and Development, adds that "using home video is especially important for small stations with limited budgets, because people who live where news happens can cover it quicker and cheaper."

News director Steve Grund of KWGN-TV, which serves the Denver area, agrees: "If television stations are truly committed to the local community, it is a terrific opportunity to improve local television offerings."

This past April, when a series of tornadoes swept through Kansas, Wichita television stations were swamped with people wanting to sell video of tornadoes. "We used about a dozen pieces," recalls Bob Yuna, KSNW-TV news director. "By and large, the video was really quite good."

KSNW has been soliciting amateur video for several years and, according to Yuna, the station has used about a hundred clips overall. "Many people feel as though it's almost their duty to go out and get those pictures," he says. "It becomes a symbiotic relationship — the people actually feel bonding between themselves and their TV station."

Yuna is one of many news managers who are worried that amateur photographers may endanger their lives in their eagerness to get the pictures. In one case, he says, a man and woman chased a dangerous, unpredictable tornado with their child in the car. Competing station KAKE-TV was so concerned about the safety of amateur photographers that anchorman Larry Hatteberg went on the air to ask people not to take risks.

"A number of stations are asking people to sign a waiver [before the station buys video]," says John Yurko, a consultant for the firm of Frank Magid Associates. "We certainly think that's a wise thing for our stations to do, to establish the ground rules before stations get involved."

The waivers vary widely from station to station, but most of them release the station from any liabilities incurred during the taping of the story, including injury and property damage. The waiver also specifies that the agreement to buy tape is a one-time affair, not a contract or retainer for future taping.

Another legal concern — one that has received a good deal of attention in recent months — centers around copyrights and ownership. After George

photo: Eugene W. McCaul/National Center for Atmospheric Research

Greg Luft teaches broadcast journalism at Colorado State University in Fort Collins and also reports for KWGN-TV in Denver.

Holliday videotaped the Rodney King beating in Los Angeles, he sold the videotape to Los Angeles station KTLA-TV with no written agreement specifying how it could be used. KTLA-TV, the first to air the footage, later shared it with CNN; many stations eventually obtained the story from satellite transmissions and they, too, broadcast the footage. Later, Holliday and Jordan, his attorney, sent letters to stations across the country, demanding payment from each news operation that had used the video.

Jordan contends that Holliday owned the copyright from the moment he recorded the pictures and that every station that used the footage without paying for it violated Holliday's copyright. "They basically stole it from him and gave it to everyone else," Jordan says.

John Ray, news director of WEWS-TV in Cleveland, believes that the ownership controversy will make stations more cautious about using amateur video. "But I don't think it's going to end up being a severe impact," he adds. "Everyone will just have to look closer at the practice of passing it on."

With legal issues being raised, many amateurs are looking for help in copyrighting their video and negotiating with stations to sell the pictures. Several organizations have been formed that are designed to do just that.

The San Diego-based Home Video Network, established last year by former television news reporter and anchorman Larry Roberts, claims several thousand members; for $19.95, they receive a videotape explaining how to shoot television news. An additional $10 buys a subscription to a newsletter that tracks the video free-lancing industry.

The Denver-based Amateur Video News Network was established in 1988 by former broadcast engineer Ron Brown. AVNN claims 400 members, who pay a fee of $89.95 for a press credential kit, a procedures manual, and a videotape that explains legal issues, including copyright, privacy, liability, and public domain, and that also provides information on basic photography techniques, in-field etiquette, and what kinds of video are most likely to sell. Brown hopes that education provided by the network will help avoid many potential legal problems.

Copyright and other legal issues are not the only trouble area. With so many people interested in providing video, stations are also confronting new ethical dilemmas when considering which video to use.

For example, Tulsa station KTUL-TV recently used footage submitted by a participant in an abortion protest. Despite the amateur photographer's vested interest in the event, weekend producer Elspeth Bloodgood decided to use the pictures, because the station had not been able to cover the demonstration, in the course of which some arrests were made, and because she believed the video presented the protest in a fair manner.

Bloodgood adds that she uses "quite a bit of amateur video" on Saturdays

FROM COURT TO SCREEN: *First used as evidence, home video footage of a child who behaved like a dog was shown, electronically masked, on TV in Tulsa.*



HI 8: EXPANDING THE ROLE

As the networks scale back their international news coverage, the new technology is taking up a bit of the slack. A case in point is an experiment being carried out by *The MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour* in conjunction with Time Warner Inc. *Time* correspondents are being provided with Hi8 cameras that will allow them to shoot video for use by the *NewsHour* while gathering information for their print dispatches. Each side figures to profit by this trial marriage of convenience: *MacNeil/Lehrer* hopes to plug into an established network of seasoned correspondents throughout the world; *Time,* for its part, will get to test out its potential as a supplier of foreign news footage.

This past May, *Time*'s Cairo-based correspondent Bill Dowell reported, shot, and narrated a seven-minute piece on oil fires in Kuwait for a mere $1,800 (the discount cost of his camera). Dowell's piece aired on *MacNeil/Lehrer* the same week that his print story ran in the magazine. *CBS This Morning* also used *Time* and *MacNeil/Lehrer* footage.

Weighing only about five pounds and retailing for less than $10,000 — approximately one quarter the price of a standard network rig — the Hi8 is small enough to be mistaken for the video camera of a tourist. It can also be easily concealed. This makes it invaluable as a means of documenting events in countries that attempt to censor independent reporting.

The PBS program *South Africa Now* was a pioneer in the use of the Hi8, slipping several into South Africa and putting them in the hands of locals, making it possible for those closest to the story to describe what was happening at a time when censorship was being strictly enforced. Danny Schechter, the show's executive producer, is preparing to launch *Rights and Wrongs*, a broadcast that will use Hi8 to capture human-rights abuses worldwide. "Our motive for using Hi8," he says, "was its low cost, high flexibility, and low visibility compared to TV news rigs."

Two years ago, when Bob Parry, a former *Newsweek* reporter, approached PBS's *Frontline* about new leads that might tie former CIA Director William Casey to the Iranian captors of American hostages, executive producer David Fanning was wary — wary about the allegations and about the resources needed. He eventually consented to send Parry off with a *Frontline* producer and a Hi8 camera.

Whenever Parry found somebody who would talk on the record, he did not have to make arrangements for a crew to arrive several days hence and reshoot an interview, but was ready to film. Without Hi8, sources might have

John Brodie is staff reporter for Spy *magazine.*

and Sundays because the skeleton weekend crew cannot cover everything that happens. She also likes to present amateur video because "there's something about the unpolished quality that tends to make it seem more real. Also, people tend to sanitize their actions when they know a station's news crew is there, while they are not as aware of the videotaping when people are shooting with a home video camera."

Yet another concern involves people who attempt to fake footage. Audience Research and Development consultant Jeff Bartlett believes people "are most likely to get away with faking feature-oriented stories. Legitimate news events can be checked out too easily."

Home video footage is increasingly finding its way onto television screens via court trials in which footage is introduced as evidence. Television stations in Tulsa, for example, were recently allowed to broadcast footage used in a child abuse case. The grandparents of a toddler were accused of mistreating their grandson by leaving him in a dog pen in close proximity to dogs for long periods of time. The child was taken away from the grandparents and put in a foster home. The foster parents, shocked to find that the boy acted like a dog, used their home video camera to record the child barking and walking on all fours. The video was later used in the case against the grandparents.

Once the video was used in court, Tulsa TV stations were granted permission to broadcast it and did so, taking care to use electronic masking techniques so that the child could not be recognized.

There is no way of knowing how the home video revolution will change the future of television news. But Ron Brown of Amateur Video News Network contends that the phenomenon contradicts the premise of George Orwell's *1984*, in which the government watches everything everybody does. "In 1994," Brown says, "the world population is going to be watching the government, and just about everything else, with camcorders." ◆

OF TV REPORTER

BY JOHN BRODIE

slipped away or had time to have second thoughts about going public. As executive producer Fanning says, "*High Crimes and Misdemeanors* is a major documentary that could not have been done within our budget without Hi8."

Another boon of the new technology



CJR/Harvey Wang

is the intimacy it helps to create between interviewer and subject. People often freeze up when cables and hot lights invade their living room: a videocam, on the other hand, has become a familiar presence at many family gatherings. As Al Briganti, executive producer of CBS's new real-life courtroom program *The Verdict*, suggests, "The more show-business baloney involved in gathering video, the more uptight your news source is."

In smaller markets, where hardware and operational costs were once considered daunting, the Hi8 has encouraged innovative ways of covering the news. Fox Incorporated is considering using the Hi8 as an affordable means of establishing news coverage for its 120 affiliates in smaller markets. Freedom Newspapers Inc., a privately held corporation that owns and operates five network affiliate stations and fifty newspapers, recently established a twenty-four-hour-a-day local news channel in Orange County, California. In its first year of operation, OCN — the acronym stands for Orange County NewsChannel — has not only covered school boards and traffic, but has also created *OCN Sports Talk*, a Friday-night broadcast with highlights from nearly thirty Orange County high school games. Shot by a dozen teams working with Hi8s, the highlights are punctuated by coaches and star players, fresh from the showers, dropping by the studio. Local retailers have responded by choosing OCN's cheaper ad rates and local market share over those of Los Angeles affiliates.

The new technology has its drawbacks — and its critics. Even under optimal conditions, the Hi8 produces an image that is less clear than that normally seen on network television. But as Jay Fine, NBC News's vice-president of operations, says, "If this is the only picture you have, you're not going to care about quality."

Even Hi8 fans, like CBS executive producer Andrew Heyward — whose broadcast *48 Hours* has used the cameras for combat footage and underwater photography and has even put them in the hands of Soviet policeman for a segment called "Moscow Vice" — points out that "it's a leap of faith to jump from everybody possessing the technology to everybody being an accomplished, professionally trained journalist." Also, the jury is still out on such questions as whether print journalists can or should double as cameramen, and whether videojournalists can effectively produce, report, and shoot their own footage.

Not surprisingly, union officials express concern about the Hi8, which, they contend, may encourage news divisions to send cameramen out alone into dangerous situations. Calvin Siemer, a vice-president of Local 11 of the National Association of Broadcast Employees and Technicians, says, "If you don't have that extra pair of eyes around you because you're totally involved in what you're shooting, you can be very vulnerable."

Nevertheless, the future of the new technology appears bright. PBS is planning to give cameras to several print correspondents covering the '92 presidential campaign and have them shoot footage that may become video's equivalent of T.E. White's *The Making of The President*. ◆

DECONSTRUCTION AND THE GET-REAL PRESS

Reporters routinely cover complicated science stories. Why can't they cope with a literary theory that has sparked debate on campuses across the nation?

BY MITCHELL STEPHENS

No theory has caused as much turmoil in the universities in recent decades as deconstruction — on this one point, at least, its legions of champions and detractors are in agreement. Thousands of careers have been rerouted; academic departments have been consumed by feuds, scholarly associations torn in two.

Deconstruction's practitioners believe it has transformed nothing less than the way they read. Harvard's Barbara Johnson, for example, compares her introduction to deconstruction to "the moment when Helen Keller first understands the connection between the signing she is being taught and meaning." Deconstruction's critics are equally impassioned. "Deconstructionism," writes Allan Bloom in *The Closing of the American Mind*, "is the last, predictable, stage in the suppression of reason and the denial of the possibility of truth in the name of philosophy."

Indeed, the tensions caused by deconstruction's march through the graduate schools have helped fuel the current debates on multiculturalism, the undergraduate "canon," and even "political correctness." When magazine articles — influenced or in some cases written by cultural conservatives like Bloom, Roger Kimball, and Dinesh D'Souza — list the forces that have destroyed all that was good in American academic life, deconstruction is usually placed second, just behind "1960s radicals with tenure." *Newsweek*'s fierce attack on political correctness is typical of the genre: "Intellectually, PC is informed by deconstructionism," the magazine stated in a December 24, 1990, cover story titled "Thought Police."

Are such charges valid? What does deconstruction mean? What is its significance? Alas, most American newspaper and magazine readers have no idea.

"Recent literary theory is so rarely accorded the privilege of representing itself in nonacademic forums," complains Michael Berube, a young literature professor writing in *The Village Voice*, "that ... few general readers are informed enough to spot even the grossest forms of misrepresentation and fraud." Many of his colleagues in academe share his frustration. The gulf between the press and the universities has rarely seemed so wide.

The philosopher Jacques Derrida, who fathered deconstruction in Paris in the 1960s, introduced it to an apparently stunned audience of American academics at a conference at Johns Hopkins in 1966. Word quickly spread. American literature departments — Yale's the most prominent among them — were the first to fall under deconstruction's spell, but by the late 1970s and early 1980s philosophers, political scientists, psychologists, law professors, artists, and architects all found themselves debating, often heatedly, the teachings of this difficult, enigmatic French thinker and his American followers.

The scholarly journals and academic presses were full of deconstruction. (Derrida's name has been included in the title of a couple of dozen books.) But newspapers and magazines paid scant notice. Between 1973 and 1979, while four of Derrida's own books were being published in English translations and his method was roiling the campuses, the word "deconstruction" never once appeared in the Nexis selection of American magazines and newspapers.

By the late 1980s many of those involved with deconstruction could recall having read a few articles in mass-circulation publications that grappled with their work, but they were the same few articles: a feature in *Newsweek* in 1981, a book review in *The New Republic* in 1983, and a profile of the "Yale School" of literary criticism in *The New York Times Magazine* in 1986. Seventeen, then twenty years after it first landed on these shores, *The New Republic* and the *Times Magazine* pieces earned "Deconstruction" its first two refer-

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ences in the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* (between "Decomposition" and "Decorated eggs").

The word "deconstruction" has received considerably more play recently. Indeed, it has managed to follow "existentialism" as one of the few terms to escape the terra incognita of the graduate schools and become a fairly regular visitor to the pages of newspapers and magazines. *The New York Times*, for example, recently referred, twice in a few days, to the "deconstruction" of the boxer Mike Tyson. But such references don't do much to increase readers' understanding.

And when the press has felt called upon to explain, more often than not it has made do with one or two sentences. In 1986, for example, when the University of California at Irvine wooed two of the leading practitioners of deconstruction, J. Hillis Miller and then Derrida himself, away from Yale, the *Los Angeles Times* and *The Orange County Register* responded by borrowing a helpful-sounding explanation from a university press release — "Deconstruction's central point is that language is circular (words refer to words)" — and then using variations of this line in two articles each.

Many recent references to deconstruction have been not only sketchy but sardonic. ("It's much easier to make fun of it than to try to understand it," notes E. J. Dionne of *The Washington Post*, who has been gathering material for a possible article on these matters.) For example, in a series of cleverly written opinion pieces honoring the arrival in southern California of Miller and Derrida, Bob Emmers of the *Register* proudly proclaimed himself a defender of "reality" and concluded — based on his reading of coverage in the local papers — that deconstruction smacked of "pure mumbo jumbo" (a conclusion shared, to be sure, by many academics). Jack Smith of the *Los Angeles Times* would write a few columns in a similar vein a few years later.

Even deconstruction's practitioners would concede that the task facing journalists who want to do better is not an easy one. This is a subject that will require more than a couple of quick calls on deadline.

At its most basic, deconstruction is a type of reading — unusually close reading — which focuses, obsessively, on the metaphors authors use. When examined with this intensity, those metaphors sometimes appear to contradict the arguments in which they are deployed. Plato, for example, trying to prove that speech is superior to writing, falls back on this metaphor: speech "is written ... in the soul of the learner." Such contradictions, deconstruction's practitioners argue, reflect cracks in the underpinnings of our culture.

One way of trying to understand this is to have a go at deconstructing an element of the foundational beliefs of journalism. The first step would be a close reading of a volume of the journalistic canon, such as that seminal work in the development of our notion of objectivity, Walter Lippmann's *Public Opinion*, published in 1922.

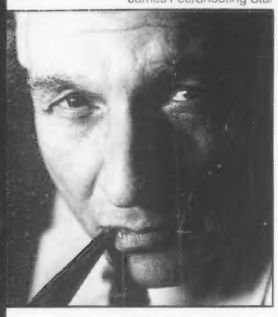
Journalistic objectivity, to pursue the example, is based on a belief in facts, in some sort of hard, discernable *reality* (the standard Bob Emmers is so eager to salute). It seems crucial to Lippmann that "reality" — which also goes by the names "the facts" or "the world" — is found "*outside*" of us, at a safe remove from our stereotypes, opinions, and beliefs. The first chapter of *Public Opinion* is entitled "The World Outside and the Pictures in Our Heads." *Outside* is the "real environment," *inside* our heads the subjective "pseudo-environment." Fine. But early in that same chapter Lippmann suddenly employs the exact

If this is the age of the "spin doctor," those who practice deconstruction might be called "spin scholars"



Drawing by R. Chast; © 1987 The New Yorker Magazine, Inc.

James Fee/Shooting Star



Jacques Derrida, founding father of deconstruction

opposite image. "Reality," magically, is now to be found *inside* of us, in "the interior scene," not the "facade" we present to the world. And the location of this "reality" will shift a few more times before the book ends — now "outside" again, now "inside," often "hidden."

At the least, such deconstructive readings demonstrate that writers are never in perfect control of their wordings, that even the formulations of a Walter Lippmann can get turned inside out. The meaning of a piece of writing, therefore, can never be completely pinned down, even by its author. Words are loose, rough devices, always subject to interpretation and reinterpretation. (This does not mean, Derrida is quick to note, that there is *no* meaning or that *any* interpretation is valid.)

But deconstruction's practitioners also have a more lofty goal. They believe their readings show that the distinctions we inevitably draw, the distinctions upon which our culture is based — that real is superior to pseudo, for example — are not as clear-cut as they appear. If we read carefully enough, these distinctions are thrown into question or, to use the jargon, "disturbed."

Walter Lippman can't decide where to locate reality because reality defined as completely independent of our perceptions of it does not exist

In other words, Lippmann's attempt to distinguish between "the world" and our "picture" of the world can never entirely succeed. He can't decide where to locate reality because that pure kind of objective reality, defined as completely independent of our perceptions of it, does not exist. Lippmann's "reality" is just another interpretation. And a culture — the culture of journalism, for example — that has been constructed upon such concepts rests on cracked stones.

Does this mean that our Western ways of reasoning are being "suppressed" in deconstruction, as Allan Bloom charges? Well, Derrida and friends don't meditate or intuit or guess; they rely on logic, often extremely complex logic. But they *have* charged themselves with trying to reason out the limits of reason — a task with some paradoxical and disquieting implications.

Does all this have any relevance? Deconstruction, like it or not, is a product of our time, and it seems to speak to some of the more interesting social and political trends of our time. Hard distinctions — masculine/feminine, bourgeoisie/proletariat, East/West — seem to be crumbling around us. For better or worse, our politics, our commerce, our art seem increasingly self-conscious, increasingly concerned with interpretation rather than "reality" (which in a world dominated by television often does seem to be wearing quotes). If this is the age of the "spin doctor," those who practice deconstruction, and through their readings investigate the mechanisms of interpretation, might be called "spin scholars."

Critics of deconstruction believe that by "disturbing" all those distinctions and insisting on the primacy of interpretation it has contributed to the devaluation of standards and the depletion of meaning. (While it just requires an oversimplification to get from deconstruction to multiculturalism, it takes an athletic leap of logic to get from there to the intolerance of intolerance attributed to political correctness.) Deconstruction's supporters instead believe its primary role has been to examine the cracks that have led to this recent slippage in "standards" and "meaning."

All this is impossible to sum up in a couple of sentences. It may not have been possible to explain, with the clarity magazine readers have come to expect, in these nine paragraphs. (Jonathan Culler's book *On Deconstruction* provides a good starting point for those who want more.) Derrida himself suggests that it will take many news articles on the subject before a general audience begins to understand deconstruction.

The question is why those articles, difficult as they may be to report, have not been written. You don't have to believe in deconstruction's merit to accept its significance. Why hasn't the press been able to contribute much more than twenty-year-late hints and gibes to the public's understanding of it?

Journalists, we are told, are better educated than ever. For their impressive new science sections they routinely penetrate laboratories and lecture halls in search of the latest on molecular biology or subatomic particle physics. Yet the no more complex theoretical goings on in humanities departments, when they are not being mocked, are usually ignored. Deconstruction is just one of the areas of contemporary thought that have been obscured by this blindspot.

Take recent developments in philosophy, for another example. The approach that has dominated the discipline in England and America for the past half century is analytic philosophy, which (inspired by the writings of Ludwig Wittgenstein) tends to limit its inquiry to the workings of language and logic. This has not been the place to turn for guidance on the meaning of life.

But now a new group is gaining power: "pluralists," who are open, at least, to the pursuit of questions of history, of culture, of meaning, of being — the "larger" questions — and who have been reintroducing to America the work of such "continental philosophers" as Martin Heidegger and Edmund Husserl. Analytic philosophers still control the most prestigious programs. But the forces of pluralism have gained a foothold on the fringes of the discipline, infiltrated some journals, and even taken over significant slots at the major conventions. A battle is raging.

"This is drama!" exclaims mathematician/

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philosopher Gian-Carlo Rota of MIT, and for those of us whose minds occasionally turn to those larger questions, the stakes are not small. (During a prison term in Czechoslovakia, Václav Havel was restricted by the warden to writing one letter a week, on personal topics. Havel devoted large portions of those letters to issues raised by Heidegger and Husserl.)

There ought to be room somewhere in the mass of news and features we are given each day for the occasional report from this battlefield of understandings, yet outside of the profile of some philosopher which *The New York Times Magazine* prints every decade or so, there has been little mention of the philosophy wars in the press.

"In general, American newspapers deal poorly with ideas," concedes Anthony Day, who has begun writing about "ideas," though not yet philosophy, for the *Los Angeles Times*.

Sure, journalists have their excuses. The theorists themselves are the first to admit that their work lacks, shall we say, sex appeal. "It is rare that journalists show an interest in as recondite a field as philosophy," Rota concedes. But why can't journalists approach these recondite theories by focusing on the often controversial, frequently sexy individuals who hold them?

Journalists also have a right to note that these theories often seem faddish. Analytic and pluralistic philosophy will both someday pass, just as deconstruction will pass or (according to its critics) *has* passed. But if we are kept in the dark about enough of these "fads" we may someday find we have missed what will come to be seen as the thought of our time.

It is true, too, that the ideas in question resist compression into news stories. Richard Bernstein, whose "idea beat" at *The New York Times* has brought him closer to these issues than just about any other American newspaper reporter, observes: "It is very difficult to communicate an intellectual trend in a one-thousand- to twelve-hundred-word story. And a lot of the academic presentations are written in a specialized jargon not easily subject to translation to the public."

But science, too, is difficult to explain and jargon-infested. Bernstein had been on the beat for about three years when he confronted (in print, to his credit) the question of whether the specialized vocabularies humanities theorists use, like the specialized vocabularies of the sciences, are not mere affectations but ways of speaking with added precision.

Another Richard Bernstein, a philosophy professor at the New School of Social Research in New York, takes a somewhat harsher view of journalists' failure to cover his and related fields. "It seems to me there is a style of reporting that is at its heart anti-intellectual," he says. "Its basic scheme is, What are all those queer birds worried about?"

"Anti-intellectual" is probably too broad a charge. Our better journalists have undoubtedly read their Bellow and watched their Bergman. The question rather is whether they have developed a deep aversion to one very large chunk of contemporary intellectual life — what the professors now call "theory." Those who suspect the press of such a bias found ammunition in coverage of the one event in recent years that was most successful in getting these matters into the news: the Paul de Man scandal.

When he died in 1983, at the age of sixty-four, Yale professor Paul de Man had received almost no notice from the American media. The name of this critic and theorist, the most influential American practitioner of deconstruction, had never appeared in the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* or *The New York Times Index*. His death, on December 21, 1983, commanded four short paragraphs in the *Times*, followed two months later by a longer article on its effect on Yale.

Four years after his death, however, journalists finally had a longer and more intimate encounter with Paul de Man, or his ghost. The young de Man, it had been discovered, had written literary articles, at least one of which was anti-Semitic, for a collaborationist newspaper in Belgium during the Nazi occupation. *The New York Times* got wind of the controversy — seven weeks after it had been discussed at an academic colloquium in Alabama — not because of its crack staff of reporters, but because a *Times* news clerk had spotted a two-sentence mention of "Paul de Man's early fascist writings" on page 150 of *The Village Voice*.

The resulting story appeared on December 1, 1987, on the front page of the second section of the *Times*, and many other major American newspapers and magazines quickly followed the *Times*'s lead. The de Man scandal even made the chart of the week's top stories in *The New Republic*'s "Zeitgeist Checklist."

Some practitioners of deconstruction, already suspicious of the press and unused to its attentions, seemed thin-skinned in their reaction to this coverage. They quibbled about the degree of de Man's culpability and, in an effort to protect what was left of their late friend's reputation, screamed about errors in the articles (such as the headline on the initial *New York Times* story, YALE SCHOLAR'S ARTICLES FOUND IN NAZI PAPER; it was instead a collaborationist paper). But these academics cannot be faulted for being angered by the implication, in some of these pieces, that their whole

No publication was as free with the implication that de Man's buried past revealed something rotten at the heart of deconstruction as *Newsweek*

Paul de Man, the Yale scholar whose past was used to discredit deconstruction theory



courtesy Yale University

If we are kept in the dark about enough of these "fads" we may someday find we have missed what will come to be seen as the thought of our time

movement was somehow tainted by those events in Belgium in the early 1940s.

"The debate over the collaborationist writings has become part of a wider questioning of the politics of deconstruction," suggested Jon Wiener, a history professor at the University of California at Irvine, in *The Nation*. However, when those "collaborationist writings" were being written, deconstruction, as Derrida noted in a response, "was at year minus twenty-five of its calendar," and Derrida himself was being expelled from school in Algeria because he was Jewish.

No publication was as free with the implication that de Man's buried past revealed something rotten at the heart of deconstruction as *Newsweek*. Its February 15, 1988, article on the transgressions of "the high priest of the arcane philosophy known as 'deconstruction'" (i.e., queer bird) began by listing Humpty Dumpty ("When *I* use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less") and Henry Ford ("History is bunk") as exemplars of the spirit of deconstruction. A professor was then quoted as saying that there are "grounds for viewing the whole of deconstruction as a vast amnesty project for the politics of collaboration during World War II." Even the article's author, David Lehman, has subsequently conceded (in his book on the de Man affair) that this was "a rather spectacular charge and doubtless an exaggeration." To put it mildly. And this charge went unanswered in *Newsweek*.

Lehman went on to state in his *Newsweek* piece that "the moral implications of deconstruction were devastating all along" — again giving supporters of deconstruction no chance to reply. An unnamed Ivy League professor then "gleefully exclaims, 'deconstruction turned out to be the thousand-year Reich that lasted 12 years.'" *Newsweek*'s editors drove the point home with a photograph captioned "Nazis on the march."

These and the other accusative, if less pointed, pieces that appeared during this sudden flurry of press attention to deconstruction could not help but have upset those scholars who had devoted their professional lives to its practice — few of whom have evidenced sympathy for conservatism, let alone fascism. Derrida later assaulted "the ignorance, the simplism, the sensationalist flurry full of hatred which certain American newspapers displayed in this case."

Charges of simplism and sensationalism are not new embarrassments for the press. The charge of hatred is more disturbing.

If a kind of intolerance does lurk behind journalistic attitudes toward these theories, part of the explanation may lie in the grand tradition in America, and American journalism in particular, of mocking intellectual pretensions, especially when those pretensions are expressed in large, unfamiliar words — and some of the terms used by Derrida, Miller, de Man, et al ("undecidability," "hermeneutical") are indeed mouthfuls.

Geoffrey Hartman, a professor of comparative literature at Yale, has referred, paraphrasing John Dewey, to the "illiberal attitude toward new ideas" inherent in the hard-headed American "frontier mentality." Philosopher Bernstein notes that there are "other presses in other traditions — those of England, France, and Germany, for example — where ideas are taken more seriously."

Even the "high press" in America — *The New York Review of Books*, for example — understands culture "as primarily literary/historical," Bernstein maintains. "There is almost an antipathy toward something which is more philosophical or theoretical. Yet if you consider what has been exciting in intellectual life in recent years, it would be deconstruction, the work of [French philosopher and historian Michel] Foucault, the work of [German philosopher Jürgen] Habermas — things that barely get discussed in the press."

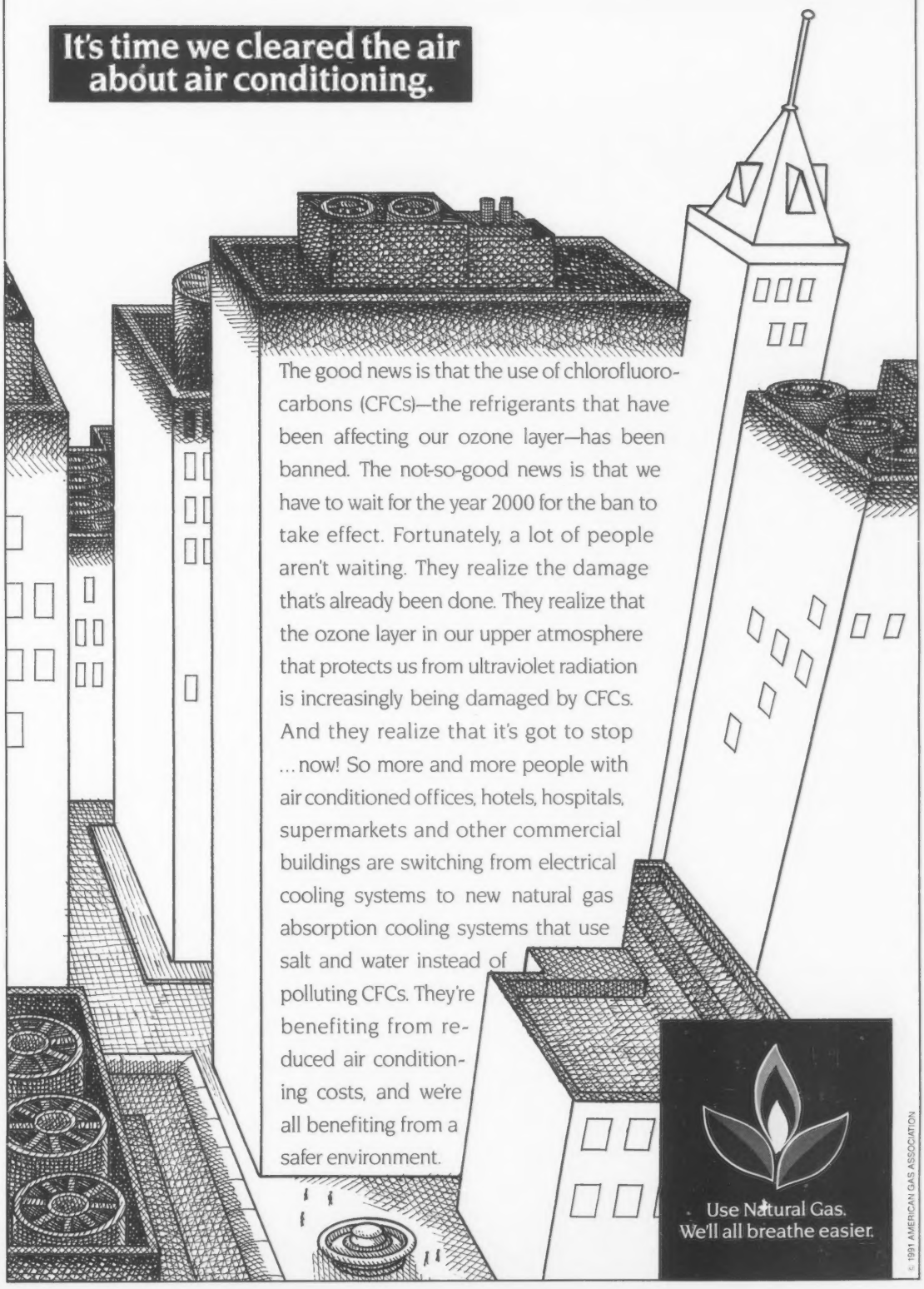
That so many of the "exciting" intellectual movements of this century have been devoted to questioning notions of objectivity, truth, fact, and indisputable meaning — notions upon which journalism's professional standards are based — certainly does not help attract reporters to these realms.

Most contemporary journalists are not familiar enough with these theories to perceive them as profound threats. Nevertheless, some, like Bob Emmers, undoubtedly do sense something incompatible with the journalist's world view in this extended critique of the belief that there is a reality that might be verified independent of language.

The major source of journalistic intolerance for contemporary theoretical work in the humanities, however, may be just simple late-twentieth-century, information-overload, get-to-the-point impatience — an impatience with jargon; an impatience with the seeming impenetrability of these new takes on such familiar matters as life and art; an impatience with, as Geoffrey Hartman puts it, "critics who make the works they are writing about *more* difficult to understand"; an impatience with thoughts that cannot be summed up in a newspaper-length paragraph; an impatience with research whose ends, as Dionne notes, are considerably less clear than those of science.

We tend to want to dismiss — as "pure mumbo jumbo," as the worry of queer ducks, as morally questionable — that which we don't have the time or energy to understand. But if we are to begin making some sense of late-twentieth-century thought and the conflicts it has engendered on the campuses, journalists are going to have to do a better job of resisting this temptation. ◆

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MAVERICK

JON ALPERT: NBC'S ODD MAN OUT

BY MICHAEL HOYT

On the afternoon of February 1, Jon Alpert and Maryann DeLeo put on their coats and started out of their New York City office, on their way to Iraq. They were carrying two new Hi8 cameras, financed with part of a $7,000 check from NBC, and by the next day they hoped to be using them to shoot stories for *Nightly News* about just what was happening in Baghdad and Basra under all those bombs.

But the phone rang and there was a hitch. Steve Friedman, executive producer of *Nightly News*, had authorized the trip; now, NBC News executive vice-president Donald Browne was pulling the plug. Iraqi officials in Jordan were apparently claiming that because Alpert already had a visa lined up in Amman, Jordan, they could not give one to NBC correspondent Tom Aspell, and NBC was having trouble explaining that Alpert, although he had a twelve-year relationship with NBC, was a free-lancer and not the person the network wanted as its main eyes and ears inside Iraq. Also, Browne did not want the network associated with former U.S. attorney general Ramsey Clark, who can generally be counted on to oppose the use of American military force, and who had arranged for Alpert's and DeLeo's visas in the first place. Clark was waiting for them at his Greenwich Village apartment.

This made for a moment of truth. They agonized a bit, made some calls, and finally told Browne they wanted to go as independent journalists. Would NBC want to take a look at the coverage they came back with? Browne again made it clear that they must not represent themselves as NBC. If they chose to go into Iraq as free-lancers, he added, they would be treated when they returned "like any other free-lancer" offering video to the network.

Which, as it turns out, was not the case. And in some ways it couldn't be, since Alpert had a unique history at NBC and was known as somebody who worked along the edge of many of journalism's rules and conventions.

His news segments, independently produced and edited, usually along with DeLeo, had brought a share of glory to the network, including six Emmy awards and an Alfred I. duPont/Columbia University Silver Baton. His *Today* show role was that of a sort of footloose cousin who stopped in from time to time with interesting stories. Alpert's personality suffused the stories. This was partly a matter of his insistent and occasionally leading questions. It was also his I'm-just-a-regular-guy manner. And Alpert hung around with his subjects long enough for them to let something human shine through the camera lens.

Occasionally his *Today* show pieces were funny, but mostly they were serious pieces about ordinary people who in one way or another were getting the short end of the stick. Sometimes they were stories from places that other reporters had not been able to get into.

Like Cuba and Vietnam. Like Iraq. As the air war unfolded in late January with almost no real coverage of what was happening down on the ground, Alpert and DeLeo asked Friedman to let them try to get in. They hired an Iraqi-American to fly to Jordan and try to get visas, but Ramsey Clark's offer came first. Clark, who had pushed Iraq's U.N. ambassador for visas, planned to visit Iraq as he had visited Libya after the U.S. bombing of Tripoli, and he wanted someone to document the journey. Alpert says he viewed the former attorney general strictly as the fastest way to a visa. So did *Nightly News*'s Friedman. "I wasn't doing a story on Ramsey Clark," Friedman says. "I saw him as a door. Other people didn't."

The door opened in any event, and on February 2 they drove into Iraq. The tapes Alpert and DeLeo brought back show an eerily empty highway to Baghdad, with the occasional bombed-out truck floating past the car window. The somewhat surreal images on the tape include a four-star hotel operating by candlelight, a mosque filled with caskets, an unidentified building sur-

VERITÉ? *Was Alpert's Iraq footage a coup — or a reason to get rid of him?*



CJR/Harvey Wang

Michael Hoyt is associate editor of CJR. *Esther Davidowitz, senior editor of* Woman's World, *contributed to this article.*

rounded by burning tires to give the impression to airborne pilots that it had already been hit.

And in the Alpert-DeLeo style, the tapes present lots of ordinary Iraqis. In Baghdad, Alpert interviews a man standing in front of the smoking ruins of what was once a market.

"My brother's place," the man says. "Bring from the river and sold fish here."

"What are you going to do now?"

The man shrugs.

In Basra, Alpert questions a grieving woman in front of her father's home.

Alpert: "What happened to your father?"

"His leg broken and his hand and his, all face — no face. His lips, and now, and everything. His eyes." Alpert finds the father in the hospital, and we briefly meet a man with all of his facial features burned away.

"We talked very directly to the Iraqi people," Alpert says. "They came across as the ultimate victims caught in the pincers between their own stupid leader and the American military machine, and they were getting the daylights squeezed out of them." He wanted to document that, Alpert says, because the air war seemed to be coming across on U.S. television as a war without bloodshed. "It was being romanticized," he says. "It cried out for reportorial presence."

One thing the Iraq tapes have in common with much of Alpert's work is that people argue about their merit. Alpert has supporters inside NBC and no shortage of critics. Mention his name and you get strong reactions, many of them from sources who don't want to be identified:

From a veteran producer: "He does verité that isn't verité. He sacrifices reality to a political point of view. He's basically not watched; he's a freelancer, and there it is."

From a former veteran correspondent: "There was a certain resentment. 'Who is this guy?' Everybody is working their ass off to get on the air and this guy, because he's offbeat, gets his stuff on the air."

From another veteran producer: "People either loved him or hated him. I thought he was fine. I think some people may not like his politics. But it wasn't disguised. He was different. So what?"

One of the hotter debates about Alpert's work centered on a segment in a 1986 series called *The Philippines: Life, Death, and Revolution*. After he and DeLeo made contact with the New People's Army, Alpert traveled with an NPA raiding party as they ambushed a government convoy. Much of this guerrilla operation, in which fourteen Philippine army soldiers were killed, was captured on a riveting tape that would later appear on *Nightly News*.

Too riveting, some thought. Alpert's critics wondered whether the ambush had been carried out for the benefit of the camera or whether, at the least, Alpert had an obligation to warn the government troops. Others, including veteran correspondent George Lewis, singled out a moment in which a nervous Alpert shouts out that the "enemy" is approaching. "It sounded as if he was warning them," Lewis says. "It

"CONGRESS SHALL MAKE NO LAW RESPECTING AN ESTABLISHMENT OF RELIGION, OR PROHIBITING THE FREE EXERCISE THEREOF; OR ABRIDGING THE FREEDOM OF SPEECH, OR OF THE PRESS; OR THE RIGHT OF THE PEOPLE PEACEABLY TO ASSEMBLE, AND TO PETITION THE GOVERNMENT FOR A REDRESS OF GRIEVANCES."

CANCELLED?

To journalists, the First Amendment is not an abstract concept but a working principle that embraces our professional lives. As the country approaches the 200th Anniversary of the ratification of the Bill of Rights, the debate over the limits, if any, to a free press continues.

Columbia Journalism Review's November/December 1991 issue will contain a special section on the First Amendment with contributions by Anna Quindlen, Gore Vidal, Jesse Jackson, Suzanne Garment, Ben H. Bagdikian, Barbara Ehrenreich, Benjamin C. Bradlee, and others, on such timely topics as:

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appeared to a lot of us that he indeed crossed over the line to become more of a participant."

Alpert says that from where he was in the Philippine jungle, there was no way to warn the government troops about the raid, which he says would have taken place whether or not a camera was there to record it. And warning either side, he says, is not the journalist's job. In the wake of the furor over the report, NBC asked two executives with combat experience to screen the tape and the outtakes. "The use of the word 'enemy' you could quarrel with. But Alpert didn't warn them; the soldiers were already seen," says one of those executives, Tom Wolzien, a former *Nightly News* producer who is now a senior vice-president in NBC's cable division. "Did he cause the ambush to come about? Nah. Nobody does an ambush like *that* just to accommodate a camera. I thought this was some of the best cinema verité material I'd ever seen in combat, and one of the gutsiest pieces of film I'd ever seen.

"I think he's an honest point-of-view journalist," Wolzien adds. "He makes no bones about it. It's almost commentary, what he does, and he brings you things that you don't get anywhere else. Other people's biases are more mainstream, so they don't think what they do is commentary too."

But in January 1989, only five months after Michael Gartner took over as president of NBC News, Alpert provided his critics with what they saw as a smoking gun in their case against him. London bureau chief Frieda Morris noticed that the tape other networks had fed via satellite from Kabul — images of the final lowering of the flag at the U.S. embassy there — looked different from what Alpert was sending to NBC. Morris asked assistant bureau chief Dina Modianot to query Alpert via the satellite channel, and, Modianot recalls, "He replied that he had arrived late and he had asked them to re-do the ceremony." The footage aired on *NBC News at Sunrise* before the editors could kill it.

To Alpert as well, the flag incident was a terrible error in judgment. "We met with Gartner," he says. "We said we had no excuses, that we would take whatever punishment they thought appropriate. They basically said, Rehabilitate yourself with good deeds. We took that real seriously."

Alpert pads around his Chinatown office in sandals and shorts as if he were at home, which he is. He and his wife, Keiko Tsuno, also a video filmmaker, and their thirteen-year-old daughter Tami, a karate expert like her father, live in the building, a magnificent if slightly dilapidated former firehouse that they wrested from the city to house Downtown Community Television, or DCTV, the community video center they founded in 1972.

Alpert, now forty-two, was a cab driver/community activist at the time and Tsuno was an artist/waitress/community activist whose filmmaker friends told her about the wonders of video. She sent money to her mother in Japan, who sent back a Sony camera. Alpert was soon using it in a union reform campaign he had gotten involved in, getting fellow cab drivers to tell their tales of unsafe equipment and gouging by the fleet owners. "When this tape was shown at one of our meetings, it was the first time we had an effective meeting," he says. "We all saw that television had a power that you could actually harness."

The idea behind DCTV was to teach community groups to harness that power, and it has taken off, financed mostly by a combination of public and private grants and the sale of work to places like NBC. In a fundraising tape, Tom Brokaw, the NBC anchor and a DCTV board member, tells us that "Each year, more than 6,000 students, mostly minorities, enroll for its free classes. Over 400 community organizations and hundreds of community producers use DCTV's equipment free of charge."

> **"That thing in Afghanistan confirmed that Jon uses techniques that we don't use"**

Through the 1970s Alpert and his DCTV colleagues turned out a series of documentaries that ran on PBS. Maryann DeLeo, while in college, had been impressed by one about health care and volunteered to work at DCTV. She soon found herself on a mission to find a young male prostitute willing to talk about his life on camera. "Ricky" became one of the six lives depicted in the 1980 documentary *Third Avenue*, about people who live and work along that New York City street.

It was in *Third Avenue* that Alpert's particular style emerged. For the first time he did his own camera work, and, instead of providing commentary, got people to tell their own stories, sometimes right into the camera. It seemed to work. "There is more drama, more life, more love and passion in this short hour than in a week's worth of prime time potboiling," Tom Shales wrote in *The Washington Post*. "*Third Avenue* is a triumph of its kind and a guidepost to a new age of television." Among the viewers was Steve Friedman, who was then running the *Today* show at NBC.

"I thought, this is the kind of stuff that we can't get, because we can't spend that kind of time with people. So I decided, let's present Jon as a [*Today* show] character and bring him on when he has stuff." Friedman exploited a loophole in union rules that let him buy essentially finished products from stringers, a loophole that also gave Alpert a great deal of editorial control.

"I never asked Jon to be a reporter," Friedman adds. "A reporter in the classic sense is somebody who does a story and gets one side of it and then goes to the other side and then presents it down the middle. Well, we never asked Jon to do that. We asked him to take a slice of life — whether it be hard-metals disease, whether it be in Vietnam, whether it be all the great stuff that he did — just present that stuff."

There is a moment in the series Alpert did for NBC about deteriorating conditions in Veterans Administration hospitals during the Reagan years that points up what some journalists see as the flaws that undermine his work. "They've really hurt you, haven't they, Rocky?" he asks a weeping man in his hospital room. But from what we see on tape it is not clear that Rocky is crying about the physical abuse he says has been inflicted on him and others by hospital personnel — charges raised but not substantiated in the piece — or even about conditions in the hospital. He seems to be crying about the fact that he

cannot live again in the world outside his window.

Hard Metals Disease, another series Alpert did for the network, on the other hand, demonstrates why some journalists admire him. We watch a former GTE Valeron plant manager and plant foreman explain how they had advance warning of OSHA inspections and cleaned up hazardous metal dust just before the inspectors arrived. We go inside a plant — the door stealthily opened by a young employee — and see that a single floor fan is the only ventilation the company provides in the area where the dust is produced. Most memorably, we meet a freckle-faced young woman named Cathy, who says that she acquired hard metals disease after taking over a job from another woman. No one told her until it was too late that the other woman had come down with the disease. Later in the series we meet her again. Two years have passed; her face is swollen from steroid treatments and, her doctor says, she will soon need regular oxygen for her deteriorating lungs.

One story idea that NBC chose not to go with was a controversial one about the bleak, self-destructive lives of three small-time Newark hoods. They were shoplifters, who obligingly performed their work in front of a hidden camera, once again raising questions in some critics' minds about the line between observer and citizen. Alpert and DeLeo took a tape of that material to Home Box Office, where Sheila Nevins, the vice-president in charge of documentaries, was intrigued enough to ask for more, and stunned by what she eventually saw. "It was very sad, it was very true, it was very different, and I thought it was very important," she says. "Jon's films are from the inside out, not from the outside in. It was as if we were in their house looking at the world, rather than the other way around."

Nevins has little patience for Alpert's critics. "Jon's politics are less important to me than his compassion," she says. "I don't even know his politics."

In wartime, of course, compassion can get political.

"So far, we've had just two ways to get a look at the damage done to Iraq — pictures taken from Allied warplanes, or footage of death and destruction shot by Iraqi television," Tom Brokaw said on the January 31 *Nightly News*. When they returned to New York, Alpert and DeLeo had what they thought was solid material to fill that vacuum, and Friedman and Tom Brokaw and Tom Capra of *Today* seemed to agree. The editing instructions, Alpert says, were to keep Ramsey Clark out of the story, to report only what Alpert and DeLeo had confirmed with their own eyes, and to hurry up and get it ready to air. Friedman confirms that a *Nightly News* piece was to run on Tuesday, February 12; Capra says two or three segments were to follow on *Today*.

> **"Jon's politics are less important to me than his compassion"**

But on the afternoon of the twelfth, Alpert and DeLeo instead found themselves in a meeting with Michael Gartner. "He said he hadn't seen the footage. He said he didn't want to see it," says DeLeo. "He said he didn't want to use anything that we ever did again. He said something like 'Every time you go to the third world there are problems.' He mentioned Afghanistan." A decade with NBC was quietly blown away.

Why? Now that the dust has settled, the players have assembled their reasons. Gartner won't talk about his; for Browne, Ramsey Clark looms large.

"Ramsey Clark got in because of his point of view, and the reason that Jon got access to things was Ramsey Clark's contacts," he says. "He did it as a freelancer and that's fine. But that doesn't mean we have to use it." Browne says that "one of Clark's aides held a press conference in Washington announcing that Alpert was going to be running a piece on NBC," further linking the network to the peace activist. And Alpert, Browne adds, was "not exactly riding high" at NBC News. "That thing in Afghanistan confirmed that Jon uses techniques that we don't use."

Alpert notes that, following the Kabul incident, he covered a number of other stories — including China during the Tiananmen Square massacre— for NBC. And he notes that Browne came out of NBC's Miami bureau, on whose territory — Cuba, Nicaragua, El Salvador — Alpert thinks he may have trod once too often. His analysis of what brought about the severing of his relationship with the network is that, while the Clark connection and his own poor judgment in Kabul were undoubtedly major factors, a more important reason was that Gartner feared taking heat for reporting an unpopular story — a story on the effect of the war on Iraqi civilians.

"I think [Gartner] thought it was an intelligent choice," Alpert says. "Keep the team happy, don't get the public riled up at NBC, don't get the government riled up, and once and for all get rid of this ornery whippersnapper who seems to do things in a different way."

Steve Friedman, a lively man who tosses a baseball into a mitt during interviews, thinks NBC ought to be commended, not criticized, for "giving Jon Alpert ten years when no one else would. Everything has its run.

"The business has changed," Friedman says. "These places are undergoing a restructuring, which doesn't really permit rogue free-lance guys working under their own frame of reference. I think Michael and Don talked and I think one of them was concerned about Ramsey Clark. I think they decided right then and there for many reasons it was time to say goodbye.

"I agreed with them," Friedman continues. "In my position, I'd have run the piece. But I only run the show. The way the business is going, you have to control what you put on the air from start to finish. I think that they said that since they had no control over Jon, that he's a freelancer, that he's part of an era gone by. The fact of the matter is, he complicated our life during a very complicated time, so the feeling was, That's it. See ya.

"Jon is a dinosaur of the eighties," Friedman concludes. "He has to reinvent himself in the nineties if he wants to be in mainstream television."

But Alpert doesn't seem to be good at re-inventing himself to suit the institutions he works with. When he has broken into mainstream TV it has been because insiders like Friedman saw value in the very fact that he can't or won't conform. And just who are the dinosaurs and who are the mammals in the TV jungle these days is hard to discern. ◆

BOOKS

THE ULTIMATE INSIDER

BY ERIC ALTERMAN

James Barrett "Scotty" Reston's legacy to his profession is difficult to exaggerate. From his storybook beginning as the ambitious son of poor, devout, Scottish-Presbyterian immigrant parents, Reston rose to become at age forty-three bureau chief of The World's Most Important Newspaper in what was then arguably The World's Most Important City. In doing so, he helped to redefine the business of journalism through his own indefatigable reporting of the inner workings of American diplomacy, as well as through his inspired hiring policies.

Upon taking over the Washington bureau from the somnolently self-satisfied Arthur Krock, Reston flanked his own reporting with a new generation of energetic, well-educated young journalists like Anthony Lewis, Russell Baker, and Tom Wicker. With David Halberstam and Neil Sheehan telexing their reports from Vietnam, Reston set a standard for discovering and nurturing talent that few, if any, contemporary editors can hope to match. Moreover, as the most influential *Times*man in Washington during the heyday of the cold war and its most respected pundit throughout nearly four decades, Reston also enjoyed a uniquely privileged vantage point from which to observe the machinations of the men entrusted with the power of the government of the United States. He could then report on and explain their actions to his readers in the context of an op-ed column published on the most prestigious page that daily journalism has yet to produce. It is with regard to his career as a pundit, rather than as a reporter, however, that Reston's legacy becomes more troubling.

The insider pundit, of whom Reston is perhaps the preeminent example, plays a unique and frequently overlooked role in the functioning of American democracy. The First Amendment guarantees a free press but not necessarily an intelligent one. The accumulated strictures of what has come to be defined as journalistic "objectivity," moreover, constrict the press's natural intelligence by forcing it to print the mendacities, simplifications, and clever deceptions that politicians and other sources make up for their own purposes. Democracy is impossible without an intelligent, intelligible "culture of community conversation," as John Dewey argued, through which citizens can communicate with one another and form political opinions within the context of something approaching a coherent world view. But the cult of journalistic objectivity, while offering relatively reliable information, does nothing to foster such a culture.

Alone in our national political dialogue, the pundits are granted permission to offer opinions and place events in context — to go beyond the "he said, she said" strictures of objective journalism to explain and advance more complicated propositions than the platitudinous sound-bites that dominate so much of our politics. But if they choose to forego this opportunity and instead parrot the pap offered up by the politicians, then they become not our last line of democratic defense but just another cog in the wheel of demagogic deception.

DEADLINE: OUR TIMES AND THE NEW YORK TIMES
BY JAMES RESTON
RANDOM HOUSE. 452 PP. $25.00

The most important question to ask about a Washington pundit, therefore, is who, exactly, is he writing for? A pundit who writes primarily for his sources benefits not only from his local popularity but also from the continuing stream of inside dope that a pleasing press provides. Such a pundit will be sought out for his advice by politicians and perhaps even asked to coach a pre-debate performance. His readers may find his column witty, enlightening, and occasionally uplifting, but the overall impact of this illusory process will be the slow destruction of democratic debate.



The New York Times

A Washington pundit who writes for his audience, however, will soon be faced with an extremely difficult dilemma. Without access to friendly sources, a regular column becomes so much mental masturbation. Almost no one, save an exceptional Michael Kinsley or Mary McGrory, is sufficiently creative to come up regularly with fresh and interesting perspectives on the news without cultivated access to high-level sources.

The story of James Reston's career is, in many ways, the story of how a reporter and pundit balanced these two competing tendencies. As the premier columnist and bureau chief for the *Times*, Reston had all the natural access behind closed doors that the journalism profession can muster. Coupled with his institutional power and prestige was a remarkably engaging personality and an infectious belief in the decency of his fellow citizens. It is easy to criticize Reston's work. It is almost impossible, any number of old Washington hands will explain, not to like him.

Eric Alterman, a senior fellow at the World Policy Institute, is the author of Sound and Fury: Washington Pundits and the Collapse of American Politics, *which will be published next year.*



Scotty Reston, 1968

Reston's memoir, *Deadline*, written after almost fifty years as a *Times*man and published four years after his valedictory column, offers a healthy portion of insider dope about past events as well as an overly generous assortment of homespun wisdom about America, the *Times*, the journalism business generally, and Sally Fulton Reston, of Sycamore, Illinois — who, if the author is to be trusted, is to wives what Roger Ailes is to negative campaigns. There are plenty of stories here that will fascinate and delight any serious student of journalism. They include a few of the "Now It Can Be Told" variety relating to Reston and the *Times*'s behind-the-scenes involvement in important matters of state.

Reston explains, for example, how he scooped the world by publishing the confidential details of the 1944 Dumbarton Oaks conference, prompting an FBI investigation in the process. And he goes into detail, for the first time, about his role in the *Times*'s tense publication of the entire Yalta negotiating record in 1953 and again in the investigation of J. Robert Oppenheimer a year later. In the latter case, a chance meeting on the Eastern shuttle led Reston to discover the details of the trumped-up security charges against the famous physicist. Reston agreed to sit on the story while Oppenheimer prepared his defense, finally breaking it less than twenty-four hours before the government did so itself. The pundit later worried that his "famous scoop" had prejudiced the board of inquiry against Oppenheimer and thus implicated him in the tragedy.

But what clearly fascinates Reston more than these events themselves are the personalities behind them. He devotes long sections of the book to profiles of the grand actors of the period, from Churchill through ten American presidents, key diplomats, and a number of famous pundits.

Reston clearly has moments that should go down in epigram history. My favorite is his description of Richard Nixon: "He inherited some good instincts from his Quaker forebears but by diligent hard work, he overcame them." More interesting are his choices of the kinds of people he admired. They say a great deal about the mindset of insider Washington and about the kind of punditry that Reston and his many imitators would produce during the course of the American half-century during which he — together with Walter Lippmann — reigned professionally supreme. For as Reston himself points out, unlike the genius Lippmann, he did not profess to have many special brilliant insights of his own. He frequently peddled not his own opinions, but instead relied on some "compulsory plagiarism" of the ideas of "well-informed officials" in high-level quarters. Exactly because Lippmann's example was so unapproachable to most journalists, Reston's model of punditry became in many ways the more influential one.

Many men who have passed through Washington during these decades have earned Reston's respect. (Owing largely to the times, one would have to say, the only women to figure heavily in this narrative are Reston's mother and his wife.) Reston liked and admired Harry Truman, Adlai Stevenson, and George Kennan. He felt enormous sympathy for Lyndon Johnson and Jimmy Carter. And he is particularly kind to his employers at the *Times*, as well as to his neighbor, friend, and fellow pundit Lippmann, about whom he nevertheless appears to have complex and occasionally mixed feelings.

But the two intellectual giants who loom over Reston's world larger than the others are the master geopoliticians Dean Acheson and Henry Kissinger. Ironically, it is these two men who also stand above all others in their impatience with, bordering on contempt for, the strictures of democracy in the conduct of U.S. foreign policy.

Reston considers Acheson "the central figure" and "principal architect" of America's emergence "from isolation to the defense of Western civilization." He notes that although Acheson was wrong about the Chinese entry into Korea, costing America many tens of thousands of lives, wrong about the importance of winning the Vietnam War, thereby costing even more lives, "recklessly belligerent" in his advice to John Kennedy about Khrushchev's threat to Berlin, and disastrously mistaken in his view of the Bay of Pigs (in both cases risking superpower nuclear war for largely peripheral causes), on what Reston calls "the big questions for which he had responsibility," no secretary of state in his time "earned so much gratitude or got so little." This is, to say the least, an extraordinarily generous assessment. Of Acheson's legendary contempt for Congress and the media, Reston is alarmingly forgiving. Nor does he shed much light on his own role as a communicator for Acheson's world view. In Evan Thomas and Walter Isaacson's *The Wise Men*, the authors note that Reston would often publish important stories regarding "big planning at State" following the days he lunched with Acheson at the Metropolitan Club.

To read Reston on Henry Kissinger today is, as it was during the Nixon administration, a little embarrassing. (Reston once titled one of his columns "By Henry Kissinger with James Reston.") Nothing in his experience in Washington, Reston says over and over in these memoirs, "was ever quite as good or as bad as the fashionable opinion of the day," and he thinks of Kissinger as a prime example of this. Reston says he "hates to think of what might have happened" if Kissinger "hadn't been around during the slaughter of Vietnam or the scandals of Watergate." He calls Kissinger "one of the most intelligent, imaginative, and

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effective public servants of his time."

Now we can argue for the next thousand years about whether Kissinger's foreign policy machinations were brilliant or criminal. We can even grant Reston's belief that Nixon might have gone even further off the deep end in Indochina without Kissinger there to help him pick his secret bombing targets and plan his invasion of Cambodia. But in praising Kissinger, Reston is praising a man who regularly misled him, who wiretapped NSC staff members to determine who was leaking to reporters when they revealed his unconstitutional maneuverings, and who urged Nixon to prosecute Reston's newspaper for its constitutionally protected publication of the Pentagon Papers. During the infamous 1972 Christmas bombing of North Vietnam, Reston wrote of Kissinger that "he has said nothing in public about the bombing in North Vietnam, which he undoubtedly opposes.... If the bombing goes on ... Mr. Kissinger will be free to resign." The only problem with the interpretation, however, was that the bombings were Kissinger's idea. He misled Reston about his own position and then misled the White House staff about these conversations, finally admitting the truth when confronted with his phone records. (These events are detailed in Seymour Hersh's *The Price of Power*.)

This kind of deception took place on a massive scale throughout, before, during, and after the Kissinger reign. Reston was not uniquely gullible and certainly not venal in his willingness to pass along Kissinger's lies. He no doubt believed them himself. But therein lies the problem. To be an effective "responsible" pundit in the Reston mode, one must grant top government officials an extraordinary degree of latitude with the truth. Time and again, our leaders have demonstrated that they are simply not to be trusted.

Reston says he has no taste for ideology and does not consider himself a loyal member of either party. He believes in men of good character, intelligence, and expertise. But because he took it upon himself to decide just who these men were, Reston too often allowed himself and his column to be used not as a critical eye for an uninformed citizenry but as a propaganda tool for a mendacious leadership. In these instances, he wrote for his sources, not for his audience. This is the primary occupational hazard in the business of insider punditry and Scotty Reston, for all his inherent decency, native intelligence, and legendary journalistic prowess, fell into it more than once.

Younger journalists have a great deal to learn from Reston's example. As a reporter, he helped set a new standard in the second half of the twentieth century and can be seen, together with Lippmann, as a seminal figure in the rise of the press to its contemporary status as America's most powerful private institution. As a pundit, his record is less inspiring. But it will be no discredit to the man if his inheritors learn from his mistakes as well as from his triumphs.

WHEN THE GANG GETS GOING

BY LAURENCE I. BARRETT

Back in Washington, Douglas Ginsburg's nomination to the Supreme Court was disappearing in clouds of remembered marijuana smoke. Out in Des Moines, Democratic presidential candidates were gathering for yet another collective appearance prior to the Iowa caucuses. The drill on that chilly November day in 1987 called for a series of solo press conferences before the main event. The tenor of these showed us at our worst.

The trade deficit? Arms control? Reaganomics? Forget about it. The questioners who dominated the interrogation of serious men contending for the presidency fixed on one subject: whether the politicians, a la the hapless Ginsburg, had ever inhaled pot and if so, when, why, etc. I recall being unable to decide whether the feeling of suffo-

Laurence I. Barrett is national political correspondent for Time.

cation that drove me from the cramped briefing room resulted from overcrowding or from a sense of being throttled by terminal triviality.

That spasm of pack journalism, mercifully, lasted only a few days and had no significant impact on the campaign. But its very pettiness earns the Ginsburg debacle's spin-off a place on Larry Sabato's hit parade of three-dozen press sensations. Sabato's roster ranges from trivial cases like the Ginsburg affair to historic events including the Watergate and Iran-contra scandals.

The common thread connecting most of the incidents is excess; too much zeal and too many echoes, in Sabato's view, too often produce unfair distortions even when the nub of the story is true. As the title implies, Sabato concludes that the media's obsession with the negative still further debases our already tinny political process.

Sabato, a political scientist at the University of Virginia, is frequently quoted by reporters because of his savvy and his agility with one-liners. Both strengths show up in his book. Deftly and succinctly, he reviews the press corps' "evolution from lapdog to watchdog to junkyard dog in the years since Franklin Roosevelt's presidency." He argues that society in general and the news business in particular would be far better off if the transformation had stopped at the second canine stage.

It's difficult to quarrel with that, or with most of the author's observations on the reasons why coverage has become more harsh and personal. One of the more interesting causes — and one often overlooked — is the dissolution of yesteryear's tacit male bonding between the men on the stump and the boys on the bus. The gender revolution, among other changes, ended the conspiracy of silence about male hanky-panky. (Geraldine Ferraro, however, can testify that the advent of women reporters hardly made life easy for women candidates.)

But Sabato's critique falters in other respects. The more important cases he reviews, including Watergate and the Iran-contra mess, clearly hinged on events that cried out for disclosure, as the author readily concedes. If anything, the press was slow on the shovel in digging into those stories. In cases of more personal exposés, such as Gary Hart's problems and Jesse Jackson's remarks about "Hymietown," the facts surely had political relevance. Sabato grants that as well, while quibbling about details. Where Hart is concerned, he says, the press's original suspicions were "almost certainly correct, but the standard of probable cause was a dubious one...." The question of probable cause figures in the issuance of bench warrants, not in reportorial ventures.

Sabato makes his charge of mindless excess stick in other instances, to be sure. Jack Kemp got a thoroughly raw deal when writers and TV interviewers insisted on reviving, ad nauseum, ancient and baseless gossip about his sexual orientation. Michael Dukakis also suffered unfairly in the heavy coverage of a psychiatric problem that did not exist.

But one core factor, which Sabato treats only glancingly, is the changing nature of politics both during campaigns and between them. The collapse of party organization and discipline has personalized the combat to the point of cannibalism. Much of the coverage too readily reflects and magnifies that feral spirit.

FEEDING FRENZY
BY LARRY J. SABATO
THE FREE PRESS. 336 PP. $22.95

This unhappy fact demands more self-scrutiny than the press at large practices. The main value of Sabato's book, given the author's serious intent and absence of malice towards journalism, is that it can stimulate some needed introspection.

Sabato titles his last chapter "Remedies." In it he urges civility, restraint, and a variety of criteria to be applied in deciding whether to publish negative material. Then, having interviewed nearly 200 journalists for this book, he concludes: "When all is said and done on this subject, it is a good bet that more will be said than done."

One indication that he is correct about that turned up while I was reading *Feeding Frenzy*. The frenzy of that moment was the brouhaha between Virginia Governor Douglas Wilder and Senator Charles Robb, a soap opera involving phone tapping, secret tape

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recordings, mutual back-stabbing, and other all-too-familiar phenomena.

In that episode, the most widely quoted expert was none other than Larry Sabato, who talked knowingly about the significant, perhaps even terminal, damage that both principals were doing to their presidential prospects. His diagnosis may well turn out over time to be true. Meanwhile, his dour pronouncements lent considerable weight to an otherwise frothy story — thereby encouraging more time on the air and more inches in print. The food chain of feeding frenzies can work in wondrous ways.

CJR/Keith Bendis



TOP OF THE HEAP

BY HOWARD KURTZ

There is a marvelous scene at the start of this book in which Lawrence Grossman, then the president of NBC News, hosts a dinner party for Jack Welch, the chairman of General Electric, NBC's corporate parent, and other company bigwigs. Grossman wants to talk about news, but Welch and NBC president Robert Wright keep sneaking upstairs to watch the sixth game of the 1986 World Series. There is so much sports banter that Grossman's wife is left feeling that her party, in Wright's words, had been "interrupted by people who are talking in Yugoslavian" — a language, of course, that doesn't exist.

That is the theme that runs through this impressively researched volume — the jarring clash of cultures between the driven, humorless, penny-pinching men who have taken control of the three major television networks and the crusading, irreverent, cost-be-damned journalists who regard their calling as a sacred priesthood.

Unfortunately, Ken Auletta rarely fleshes out this theme over the course of 656 pages. We hardly ever hear from anyone below the level of Brokaw, Rather, and Jennings. This is network life as viewed from the executive suite, the kind of inside, blow-by-blow account of corporate intrigue that Auletta mastered in *Greed and Glory on Wall Street*. There is meticulous detail on each board meeting, each management coup, each phone call about downsizing or programming or affiliate relations. Auletta has interviewed 350 people and been given "generous access," as he puts it, to the powers that be at CBS, NBC, and ABC. His brisk prose keeps things moving, but after a while the endless infighting among rich men (women barely have a walk-on role here) becomes wearying. He could just as well be writing about Coca-Cola or The Disney Company (both of which wanted to buy CBS). The reader is left with only a vague sense of what the new corporate regimes mean for the actual gathering and reporting of news.

THREE BLIND MICE: HOW THE TV NETWORKS LOST THEIR WAY
BY KEN AULETTA
RANDOM HOUSE. 656 PP. $25.00

Still, there are startling insights into the values of the corporate czars who now rule the networks. We learn that when Jack Welch exclaims, "This is the greatest day of my life!" it is because GE stock has just hit a new high. That Welch once asked why the *Today* show couldn't charge authors for book interviews. That Bob Wright wondered whether stars like Don Johnson of *Miami Vice* could host NBC news documentaries.

We learn that Larry Tisch, the Loews corporate chairman who took over CBS, scarcely watched television, liked to sit at his desk checking stock prices on his Quotron machine and hired an accounting firm to tell him once a week where more CBS employees could be cut. That one of Tisch's minions boasted of raising the price at the office Tampax dispenser from a nickel to a quarter. That Tom Murphy and Daniel Burke, the top executives of Capital Cities, which swallowed ABC, brought drug-sniffing dogs onto the premises.

"Cap Cities inspired paranoia. Suddenly ABC felt like a conquered nation," Auletta writes. One ABC executive refers to the network as "a distribution system for Procter & Gamble and other advertisers."

Auletta is equally good at illuminating the "limousine mentality" that reigned at the networks through the early 1980s, when overpaid stars criss-

Howard Kurtz covers the media for The Washington Post.

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crossed the globe with little thought for who was paying the bills. A consulting firm brought in by NBC found that half the stories assigned by *NBC Nightly News* in one two-month period never aired, even though the average correspondent was, in 1986, being paid $174,000.

But the endless wailing about waste by men who worship at the altar of stockholder value — and Auletta gives them plenty of kvetching room here — misses something about journalism that at least aspires to a higher calling, that cannot be measured as if its practitioners were cranking out engines for GE's turbines division.

What does it mean that the networks are closing bureaus around the world? That softer, fuzzier features are replacing the hard-edged stories of the past? That the Big Three now aspire to become lower-cost operations like CNN? These are questions that get lost amid the subplots about whether Larry Tisch has the votes to dump Tom Wyman at CBS or about Wright's maneuvering to replace Grossman with Michael Gartner at NBC (and toying a year later with the idea of firing Gartner).

Once every few chapters we hear from people like producer Christopher Isham:

◆

"Student nurses in Dallas in the summer and the air conditioning doesn't work so they sweat a lot!" Spelling says. "It's a 40 share! Let's do it!" exclaims Tartikoff

◆

"When I first got to ABC, if you had a story, you were told to do it. Now for an investigative story you have to go through enormous hoops with the accountants.... The accountants have more influence on how we cover the news. They ask whether it's cost effective. There are whole parts of the world we don't cover because it's not cost effective."

But no sooner does Auletta build up a head of steam than he's off describing how networks sell advertising, or how they deal with affiliates, or how Brandon Tartikoff schedules prime-time shows by moving little magnetized cards around on a metal board. It's probably unfair to criticize an author for being too ambitious, but at times *Three Blind Mice* bites off more than even the most ardent reader may want to chew.

Tartikoff, the boy wonder who has since departed for Paramount Pictures, provides some of the most colorful scenes as he struggles to pick prime-time winners for NBC. Much of this is entertaining, as when producer Aaron Spelling makes the following pitch:

"Student nurses in Dallas in the summer and the air conditioning doesn't work so they sweat a lot!" Spelling says.

"It's a 40 share! Let's do it!" exclaims Tartikoff. This elevated concept becomes *The Nightingales*, a program so embarrassingly bad that it lasts only a few weeks.

News is treated with roughly the same respect. ABC bumps *20/20* for *The Dolly Parton Show* (which bombs), and moves up *World News Tonight* half an hour to make room for *Jeopardy!* (which ends up helping Peter Jennings).

Other anecdotes make for disturbing reading. Tisch, a staunch supporter of Israel, was so enraged by a *60 Minutes* report on the American Israel Public Affairs Committee that he refused to talk to Mike Wallace, and, at a dinner party, is reported to have said that television cameras should be banned from the occupied West Bank because they incited Palestinian riots and cast Israeli policies in a bad light. The danger is not so much that Tisch would meddle directly in Middle East coverage but that his subordinates might censor themselves, as when *Today* killed a report critical of the bolts that GE used in some engines (NBC revived the story after the incident was publicized).

While there is much recreated dialogue here — part of the current novelistic fashion in which everyone reconstructs exactly what they said at a dinner party five years ago — Auletta deserves a truth-in-packaging award for putting some of the quotes in italics when he's not sure of the exact wording. And he's such a scrupulous reporter that he shares conflicting versions with the reader, rather than posing as omniscient. When Tisch, in the process of taking over CBS, tries to force board chairman Wyman's resignation, he says he told him: "Tom, if you ever left CBS I'm sure the board would be generous." But Wyman remembers it as: "Financially, I don't have to tell you, Tom, if ever you left CBS you wouldn't have to work another day in your life."

The larger lesson in this drama is that the networks are like American auto manufacturers of the 1970s, happily churning out schlock products while cable, syndicated shows, VCRs, and other forms of entertainment steadily erode their market share. The great broadcasters of the past made their fortunes by investing in what they thought the public wanted; a Larry Tisch or Jack Welch, by their own account, thinks first of holding down costs. Ken Auletta has painted a vivid portrait of these money-minded men and their bruising management style, but those interested in the future of television news will wish that he had descended from the executive penthouse and spent a bit more time in the journalistic trenches. ◆

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SHORT TAKES

NO STORY HERE



A friend of mine who is heavily asthmatic was sentenced, for political reasons, to several years in prison, where he suffered a great deal because his cellmates smoked and he could scarcely breathe. All his requests to be moved to a cell with nonsmokers were ignored. His health, and perhaps even his life, were threatened. An American woman who learned of this and wanted to help telephoned an acquaintance, an editor on an important American daily. Could he write something about it, she asked. "Call me when the man dies," was the editor's reply.

It's a shocking incident but in some ways understandable. Newspapers need a story. Asthma is not a story. Death could make it one.

In Prague there is only one Western news agency with long-term accreditation. In Lebanon, a country far smaller than Czechoslovakia, there are reporters by the hundreds. Perhaps this is understandable, for, as they say, "Nothing is happening here." Lebanon, on the other hand, is full of stories. It is also a land of murder, war, death. But as long as humans can remember, death has been the point at which all the lines of every real story converge.

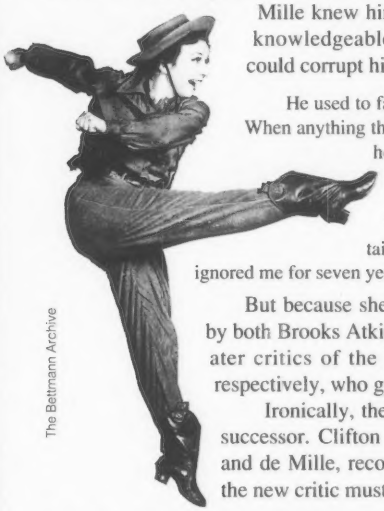
Our condition is like that of my friend: we are unworthy of attention because we have no stories, and no death. We have only asthma. And why should anyone be interested in listening to our cough?

One can't go on writing forever about how hard it is to breathe.

FROM **OPEN LETTERS: SELECTED WRITINGS 1965-1990**
BY VÁCLAV HAVEL
ALFRED A. KNOPF. 415 PP. $22

THE SEVEN-YEAR SNIT

Through the dances of *Oklahoma!* and a string of Broadway hits, [Agnes] de Mille changed the look and quality of the entire American musical theater. She started her career in 1928, a year after [John] Martin had come to *The New York Times*. De Mille knew him to be an exceptionally fine, discerning, and knowledgeable critic, but claims he had a weakness that could corrupt his judgment:



The Bettmann Archive

> He used to fall in love, now and then, with some of the dancers. When anything threatened them in any way, or worked against them, he didn't hesitate to use his great weapon of *The New York Times* personally. I think this is wicked. Well, I displeased him because I wouldn't favor him in certain ways relating to certain young men that he was interested in. He simply ignored me for seven years.

But because she was on Broadway, her works were reviewed by both Brooks Atkinson and Walter Kerr, once the influential theater critics of the *Times* and *The New York Herald Tribune*, respectively, who gave her rave notices.

Ironically, the *Times* consulted Agnes de Mille on Martin's successor. Clifton Daniel, managing editor, invited her opinion and de Mille, recounting the conversation, informed Daniel that the new critic must be an American, and should be a man,

> because dancing is considered effeminate and sissy and we labor under that stigma. I think you must get a man who can write and, if possible, a virile man. Clifton Daniel looked at me with big wide eyes as though he were an innocent child and said, "I'm not aware we ever had any homosexuality in our critical forces." I said, "Mr. Daniel, we've been drinking tea up to this point and I suggest we switch to whiskey."

FROM **THE CRITIC, POWER, AND THE PERFORMING ARTS**
BY JOHN E. BOOTH. COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS. 225 PP. $27.95

HOW TO MAKE PAGE ONE

Back when I worked for the Philadelphia *Bulletin* I suddenly was assigned to cover the annual banquet given by the organizers of the United Fund. My face, I guess, showed that I didn't think much of the job.

The editor tried to make me feel better. "I want you to get a really offbeat story," he told me. I went out and interviewed some of the banquet guests who were being helped by the fund — the impoverished, the ill, the lame, the halt, and the blind. When I came back I wrote what I thought was a moving story and submitted it.



Mark Talisman

"No, no, no," the editor who had wanted originality said. "Look. Go back to the clips and look at last year's story. That will give you the right idea."

I took the recommended clipping from the library. It was a straightforward unvarnished account of the dinner, enumerating sums collected and describing self-congratulatory speeches. I followed it word for word, simply substituting names, figures, and quotations. "This is terrific," the editor said. And the story ran on the front page.

The next year the editor said to me, "Mike, you did such a good job last time, go out and cover the United Fund again." I went, then returned to the library for the clip and repeated the process. "Better than ever," the delighted editor said. And again the story was on page one. To his happiness, I performed the exercise the third year as well. In my fourth and final year at *The Bulletin* I did it one more time. On this occasion the editor read it and began to frown. "I don't know, Mike," he said to me. "This seems to have lost some of its zip."

FROM **FORGIVE US OUR PRESS PASSES: THE MEMOIRS OF A VETERAN WASHINGTON REPORTER**
BY MYRON WALDMAN
ST. MARTIN'S PRESS. 320 PP. $19.95



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The Lower case

Marla Gets Her Man

Trump Proposes, Tells It to 'Kathie Lee'

The Washington Post 7/4/91



Aspirin claims pain regulators

The Express (Easton, Pa.) 3/3/88

Cone Heads Off Cards With Bat

St. Louis Post-Dispatch 5/25/91

Grilling turns flank steak from ugly duckling into swan

The Olympian (Olympia, Wash.) 4/24/91

Bald Eagles Raising Nebraska Baby

Omaha World-Herald 6/29/91

The program on July 22 features a Southwest menu that includes a corn and black bean salad followed by a concert entitled "Wind Spectacular."

The New York Times 7/10/91

Police ask for tips on marijuana growing

Observer-Dispatch (Utica, N.Y.) 7/17/91

Office building permits plunge

Pacific Business News (Honolulu, Hawaii) 3/11/91

Huber student has way with third graders

Huber Heights (Ohio) *Courier* 6/5/91

In Memoriam of



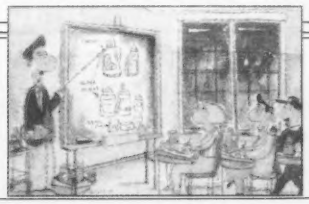
Mayor Frank Rizzo
1920-1991

Free Blood Pressure Screening

City Line News (Philadelphia, Pa.) 7/24/91

LIFE & LEISURE

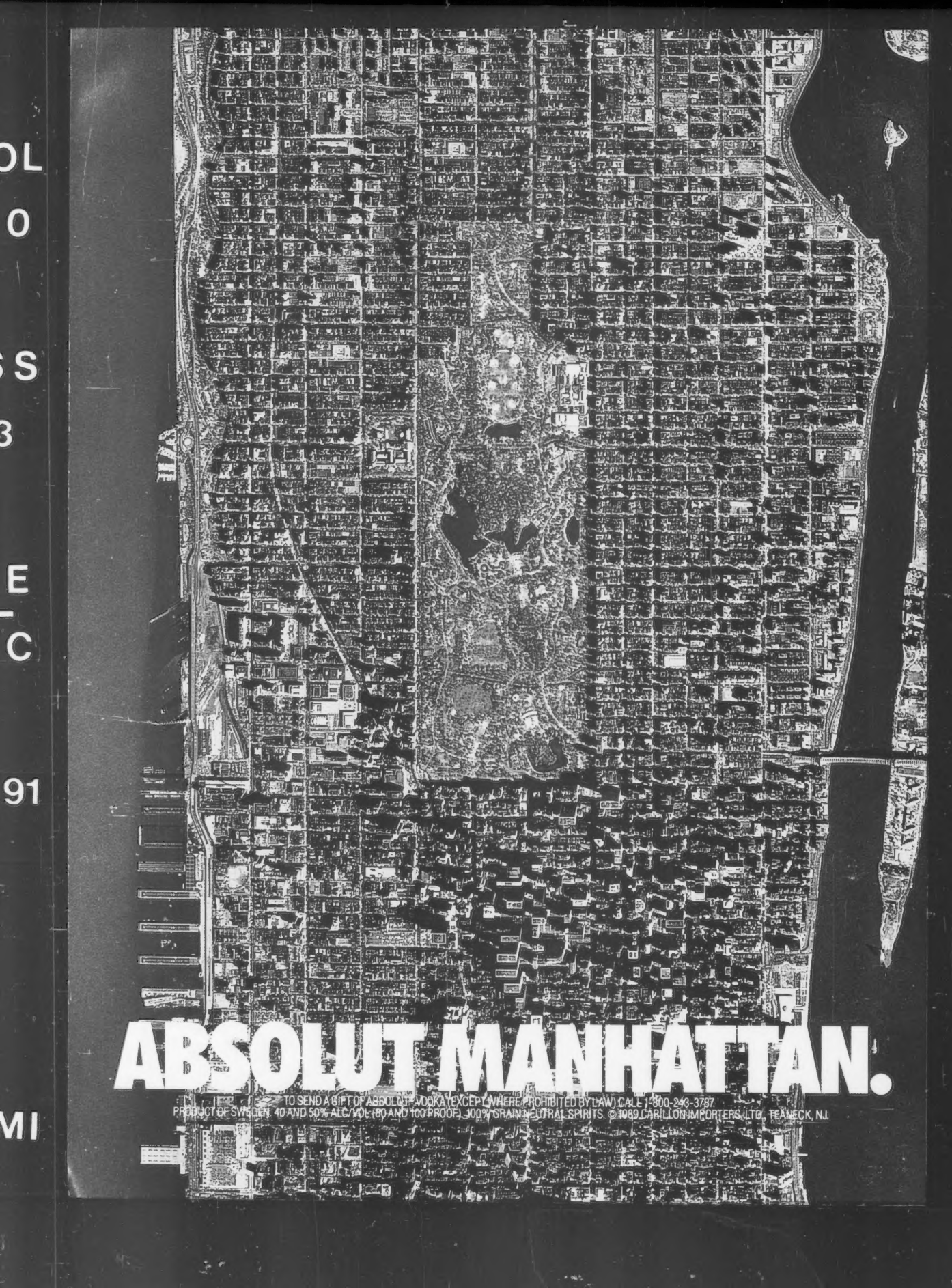
Do's, don'ts of recycling

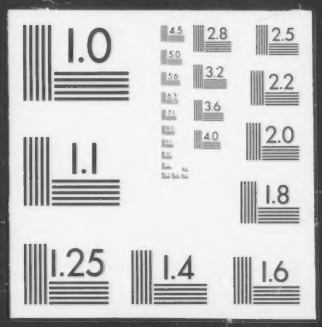


Liz Taylor to tie knot an 8th time

The Arizona Republic 7/27/91

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